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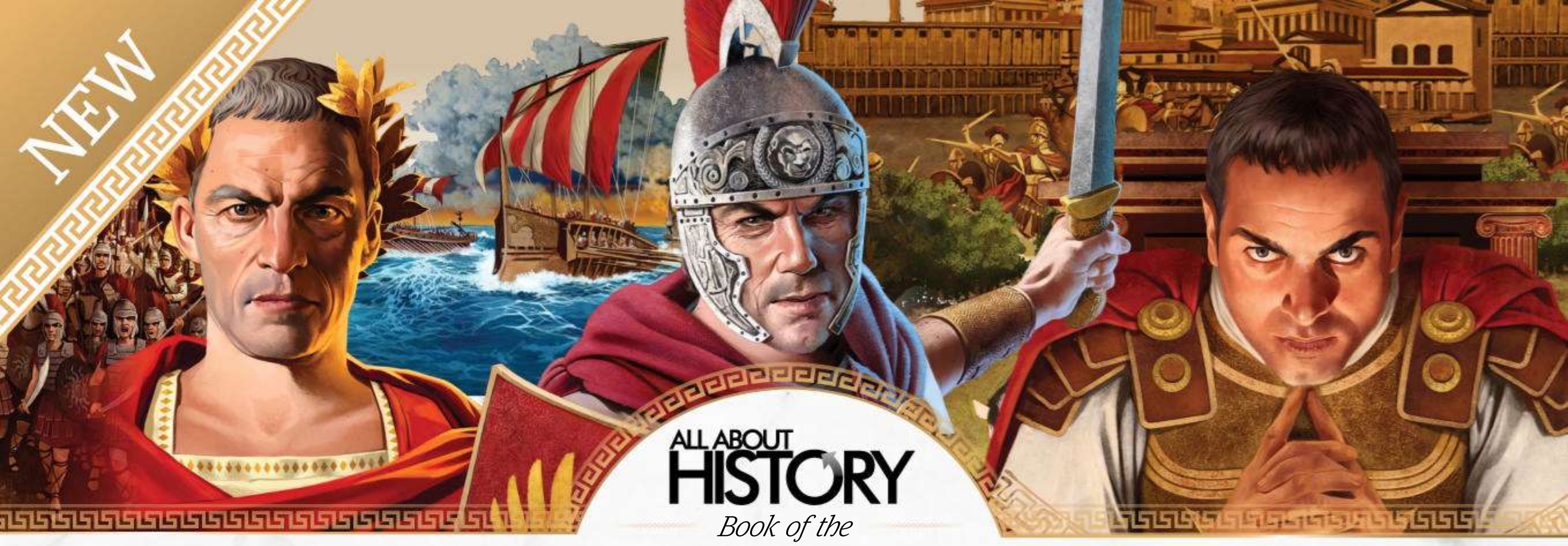

ALL ABOUT HISTORY

Book of the

ROMAN EMPIRE

THE RISE AND FALL OF AN IMMORTAL EMPIRE AND ITS LASTING CULTURAL LEGACY

Come face to face with the Roman army

Digital Edition

NINTH EDITION

EMPERORS & WARFARE ◆ CULTURE & LIFESTYLE ◆ RELIGION & MYTHOLOGY

Welcome to

ALL ABOUT HISTORY
Book of the

ROMAN EMPIRE

As Julius Caesar lay dying on the floor of the Theatre of Pompey, change was in the air. Everyone knew that *something* was about to happen, but no one could have predicted just what set of events had been put in motion.

It would take 27 years of civil war before Octavian would become known as Augustus in 27 BCE – the year that is now heralded as the birth of the Roman Empire. The first emperor would create the blueprint for a realm that would live on for more than 1,000 years.

Inside the Book of the Roman Empire, you'll meet rulers and icons from the nefarious Nero to Christian Constantine, as well as come face to face with the vengeful gods of the Roman pantheon. Head to the front lines with the ruthless Roman army, and find out how people really lived in the Mediterranean 2,000 years ago.

Once you've discovered what made this mighty empire tick, you'll finally find out just what it was that made Antiquity's most famous state fall from grace and how it still lives on today.

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The Legend of Rome

From its humble beginnings as a small kingdom of warring fiefdoms, to one of history's most imposing superpowers, Rome was a nation for the ages

Today, Rome is a beautiful tourist attraction more likely to play host to camera-toting travellers than barbarian hordes, but in the ages of the ancient world it was the epicentre of civilisation. The crown jewel of a nation that assumed every form – kingdom, republic and empire – a realm so powerful it changed the face of history forever. In the name of Rome and its ever-changing governments, it redefined the principles and engineering of warfare, revolutionised modern infrastructure and ushered in the beginning of the Middle Ages.

And like any great superpower, it carved its borders across the face of the world. From the cold shores of Britannia to the warm sands of Palestine and Egypt, Rome created for itself an empire that was a sight to behold, but one that invited attack at every juncture. The ancient world was not a pleasant place – full of plague, storms and warring tribes from every corner of the wild – but it was still a canvas upon which Rome instilled the principles of its own special form of civilisation.

It rose from humble beginnings, forming from the 'gens' or clans of Italy, united under a new king with the ambitious vision for a greater state. It was from the fires of that origin that some of the most iconic Roman concepts were forged, not least of which were the very beginnings of the Senate, the democratic voice of the people that spent the next few eras battling the rulers that would come and go at Rome's helm.

As a kingdom, Rome began to fashion itself as a capital to be proud of; the pillars and grand designs of the Greeks and the Etruscans informing an architectural flair that would find itself in everything from municipal buildings to the roads it laid across the realm. The folly of kings soon led Rome to take a new form, forged for a new age: the Roman Republic. A shining beacon of democracy built on the back of a military the world had never seen before – organised, disciplined and hardened in the name of conflict and invasion. The legions of Rome became the hammer that conquered the known world, but they would also bring the nation to the brink of destruction in a crisis to follow.

Democracy brought Rome greatness, but also left it open to the schemes of powerful men and the actions of Julius Caesar transformed the nation into a new state, one focused on conquest anew. An empire, with an emperor at its highest seat of office and a desire to reshape in his image. As the Roman Empire, Rome became stronger than ever, but for all its innovations and advancements in engineering (many of which would be lost to the Dark Ages to come), Rome would attempt to rule a world that was changing rapidly. And so its fate would be sealed – one more great empire falling in place of another.

> The Roman Empire only refers to a relatively short period in the history of Ancient Rome – it existed as a kingdom and a republic before that

The elements of Ancient Rome

From religion and the arts to the use of slaves and infrastructure, Ancient Rome was a unique society that operated on its own terms

In many ways, Ancient Rome was well ahead of its time. Despite all of the ancient trappings, the great minds of Italy were always busy looking upwards and onwards. For the Senate and Rome's many revolving leaders, extending the borders of the realm was of paramount importance. Soldiers were the true currency of progress, and conquering new lands and absorbing their people was the fuel needed to power that machine. That cycle swelled Rome's legions and the state began expanding at a terrifying rate.

Alongside this expansion, the engineers of the time revolutionised the facilities of the age. Vast aqueducts brought running water to the people and freshly paved roads (curved to drain off rainwater, no less) linked the realm together much like a concrete nervous system. Upon these roads, Rome's trade flourished and its most precious commodity, the slaves, helped the Roman economy turn (in much the same way as it would in other empires in the centuries to come).

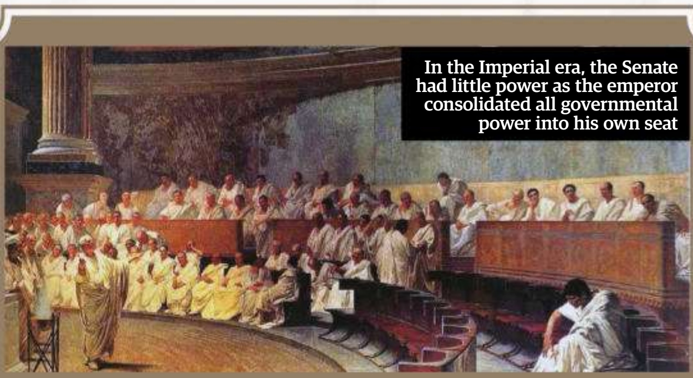
The slave trade segued into the hedonistic fabric of Roman society, fuelling a national love for bloodsports. The people adored their arts, enjoying everything from theatre to works of literature. It was a time of expression, where the real world mingled seamlessly with an almost tribalistic embrace of the gods and prayer.

> "Soldiers were the true currency of progress, and conquering new lands was the fuel needed to power that machine"

Religion

The Romans had a practical view of religion. It informed almost every facet of their lives not because they were particularly pious, but because superstitions and rituals were an everyday part of life. The Romans saw the work of the gods in everything they did, and the role of enacting those rituals fed back into society's patriarchal structure. It was the role of the head of the household to perform a day's rituals, making offerings to Jupiter or Saturn. The same idea applied to the military, with prayers made to Mars on the eve of battle.

Roman religion took many of its elements from external sources. Concepts from Greek practices and Etruscan myth became intertwined with Roman rituals, with prayer and sacrifice more of an inherent part of life than a religious element. Religion was even represented in government – the official oversight of rites to counteract bad omens and attract prosperity for a new emperor fell at the feet of the Pontifical College.



In the Imperial era, the Senate had little power as the emperor consolidated all governmental power into his own seat

Government

Ancient Rome conjures images of men in white robes arguing the issues of the day in the Roman Forum, and emperors leading armies with one hand while holding off assassination attempts with the other. In reality, the Romans lived their lives under many different forms of government, but the Senate endured through them all. Formed in 753 BCE with the creation of the Roman Kingdom, the Senate was the product of a deeply patriarchal society. The oldest and wisest men from influential families oversaw the creation of laws, conducted trials and debated on behalf of the people.

Under the guise of the republic, the Roman dream of a true democratic governance flourished. The Senate rose to its highest level of power, and through its ranks rose plebeians (regular citizens). Following the rise of the Triumvirate (where three men vied for power in government) and the eventual empire, Romans were in fealty to a single man yet again.

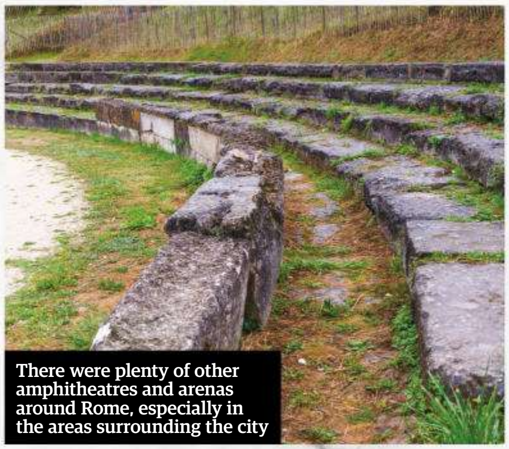
One of the greatest Roman achievements was its network of roads, some of which are still used today

Infrastructure

For the Romans, maintaining a solid infrastructure for its people was just as important as any military campaign. Rome – the crowning jewel of the kingdom, the republic and the empire – was built as the example for the rest of the realm, and the Roman government began constructing buildings out of elaborately carved stone, the artistic flair living large in the Roman architecture.

The Romans couldn't be expected to live a lavish lifestyle in their own filth, so they did what any self-respecting and enterprising nation would do – they built vast aqueducts that redirected underground sources of fresh water all the way back to Rome. These underground ceramic pipes and overground lanes (which often doubled as bridges) used nothing more than gravity to bring this life-giving resource into the capital.

And that's not to mention the breathtaking network of roads that were built to replace the dirt roads and simple lanes the Etruscans had built in the centuries before. With cement and broken stones, the Romans laid Rome at the heart of a vast network that even stretched as far as Britannia.



There were plenty of other amphitheatres and arenas around Rome, especially in the areas surrounding the city

Entertainment

The Romans liked to celebrate and often built arenas and amphitheatres. The Colosseum (sometimes known as the Flavian Amphitheatre) was built between 70 and 80 CE and proved to be Rome's grandest entertainment centre. It could seat around 50,000 spectators and even had a giant canvas canopy that could be erected above it should the baking Italian weather prove too much.

The Colosseum gives us an insight into gladiatorial combat. It was a national favourite, with everything from disgraced soldiers to well-muscled slaves eviscerating one another in the name of entertainment. Great battles were often re-enacted, with professional fighters brought in to ensure the history books were adhered to in the arena.

Chariot racing was another popular source of entertainment and its results could often turn just as bloody should a chariot crash. Violence was the means by which Rome had become a superpower, so it only seemed fitting its own people would gain an insatiable bloodlust when it came to how it kept itself entertained.

Military

To the Romans, the armies formed a vital part of its expansion and continued safety. A force so powerful it dominated the Western world for over 1,000 years, it's an example of organisation and discipline that remains one of history's most fearsome forces. The Roman armies believed themselves descended from Mars himself, the god of War, and they took that sense of immortality into battle, making them a fearsome sight to behold.

The continued maintenance of a military permeated every aspect of Roman society. It informed the increasing *populus*, with women actively encouraged to have many children in order to increase the chance of producing boys. Young men were expected to join the armies and serve, while elders with any experience of leading men were expected to join the legions and do their duty in the name of Rome.

What set the Romans apart from the many barbarians they encountered was their ironclad sense of discipline. Soldiers were drilled constantly in everything from marching formations to shield walls and Roman generals inspected each element of warfare – camps, weapons and tactics were under constant inspection and it made the Roman war machine legendary.

Slaves could have families, but any children born to a slave woman would also become enslaved by proxy

Slavery

Owning slaves, which could be bought in marketplaces across Rome and throughout the realm, was a sign of status and power among the high-ranking families. Young boys or men often proved the most expensive, since they could be put to so many different tasks. Slaves came mostly from conquered lands and with the military in a near-constant state of expansion during the republic, Rome was awash with a regular flow of souls.

The figures surrounding the number of slaves in Rome at any one given time remains sketchy, but it's believed that at the height of the empire slaves represented around 25% of the population. It's hard to tell how many slaves a wealthy family could have, but it's thought the number ran into the hundreds.

The assumption that every slave lived a destitute life is one of many inaccurate facts surrounding the Roman slave trade. Slaves were an expensive investment and were often fed, clothed and treated with care. Those with a particular skill, such as cooks, were also highly prized and often lived comfortable lives in a household.

The arts

The Romans were a very expressive people and we can see that in the sheer breadth of mosaics, sculptures, potteries and architecture they produced. At its core, Roman art was a melting pot of other cultures and influences – the Greeks, with their love of pillared architecture and white stone statues, became a major influence. As did the Etruscans, the people that preceded the Romans, with their love of wall painting and bronze statues.

During the republican, art became a way to express one's position. Paintings and wall carvings of military successes were commissioned by the state and positioned around the city, while wealthy men had their likenesses immortalised in a bust. Most chose to have their features aged – this was to present a man who had given his life to support the state. Roman art was often a representation of status, especially in the imperial era where the 'classical' (or Greek) style was re-embraced as the emperors attempted to reconnect with Rome's past.

The Roman Kingdom 753 – 509 BCE

Rome is founded/ Romulus becomes king

753 BCE

Once a series of warring tribes and clans, the strongest among them are united underneath the warrior general Romulus. He installs himself as king and forms the very first incarnation of the Senate. The eldest members from the most powerful and influential *gens* (clans) are chosen, Italy's deeply patriarchal makeup placing a great deal of importance on the wisdom of its older male members. Around 100 members are chosen by Romulus, and the Senate begins by taking care of the day-to-day running of the kingdom. Together, the very first laws of the land are written and the first standing armies formed.

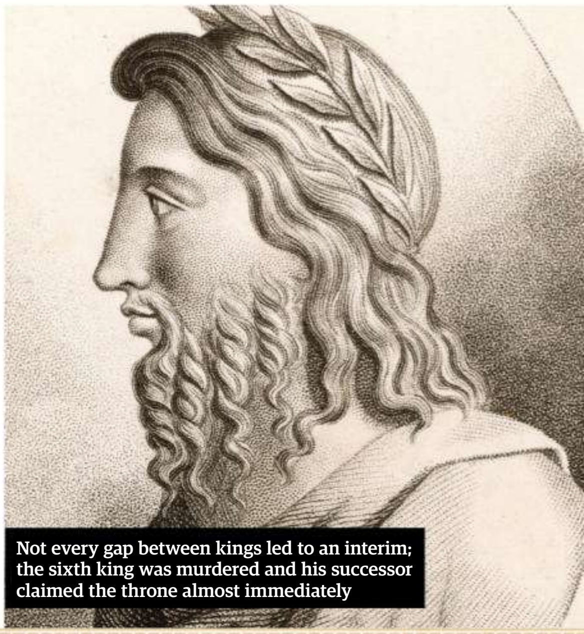
Romulus and his brother, Remus, are as steeped in legend and myth as they are in actual history

The Roman style of architecture lives on in the 18th-century neoclassical style that can be seen to this day

The interim begins

716 BCE

Following the apparent "death" of Romulus, by order of the Senate, Rome enters an interregnum (a gap). This is a period of year or less where the traditional form of government simply does not exist, where one king has died but another has yet to be determined. The democratic principles of the Roman Kingdom state that only the Senate or a similar body has the power to make a king, so over a period of a year, ten different men rule the kingdom one after the other. This provides the Senate with the information it needs to select one of them as the next king.


Not every gap between kings led to an interim; the sixth king was murdered and his successor claimed the throne almost immediately

Romulus passes away
Around 716 BCE, Romulus mysteriously disappears during a storm. Some legends say he was murdered, but the reality is the kingdom no longer had a king.
716 BCE

Tullus Hostilius becomes king
After a short interregnum, the candidate Tullus Hostilius is selected as king. Unlike his predecessor, Hostilius is a monarch more interested in conquest than peace.
673 BCE

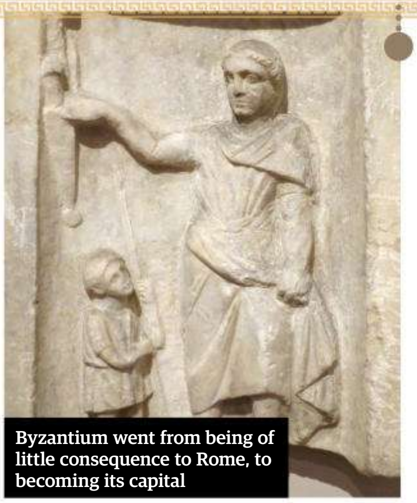
Tullus Hostilius passes away
With a reign that sees Rome's borders expand like never before, the warlike Tullus Hostilius dies. His reign is likened to that of Romulus.
642 BCE

753 BCE — 716 BCE — 715 BCE — 673 BCE — 667 BCE — 642 BCE — 617 BCE

Numa Pompilius is elected king
With the interregnum now over, the Senate swears Sabine noble Numa Pompilius in as king. According to Roman historian Plutarch, Pompilius was born on the day of Rome's founding.
715 BCE

Numa Pompilius passes away
Following a reign that saw many of Rome's religious institutions founded, including many of its temples, Pompilius dies.
673 BCE

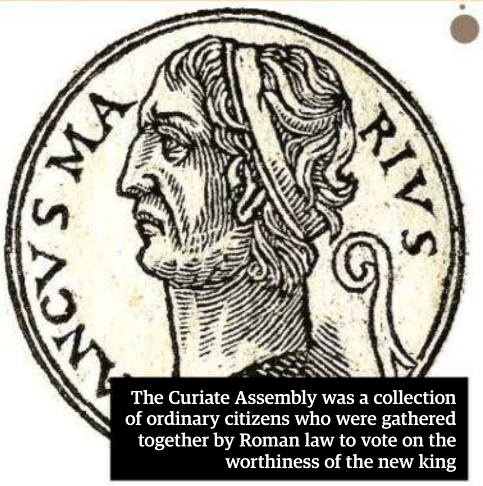
Ancus Marcius passes away
The fourth legendary king of the Romans, who helped reaffirm Numa Pompilius' work on Rome's religious infrastructure, dies.'
617 BCE


Byzantium went from being of little consequence to Rome, to becoming its capital

Byzantium is founded

667 BCE

Around 667 BCE, the first roots of Byzantium are sown; a nation that will go on to be a foe, and an eventual conqueror of Rome. According to legend, the city was founded by Byzas who sailed from a city-state near Athens called Megara. With its position at the only entrance to the Black Sea, Byzantium would grow into a powerful nation fuelled by its steady trade.



The Curiate Assembly was a collection of ordinary citizens who were gathered together by Roman law to vote on the worthiness of the new king

Curiate Assembly elects Ancus Marcius

642 BCE

As with many kings who ruled in the Regal era, an interim period took place between Hostilius and his successor. In between the election of the new king, an interrex is established (meaning a regent of sorts is appointed to look after the kingdom). The Senate selects suitable candidates before the people of Rome vote who it is they wanted to rule them. The legislative group that appoints the new leader, Ancus Marcius, is known as the Curiate Assembly.

The Forum's central building is constructed

600 BCE

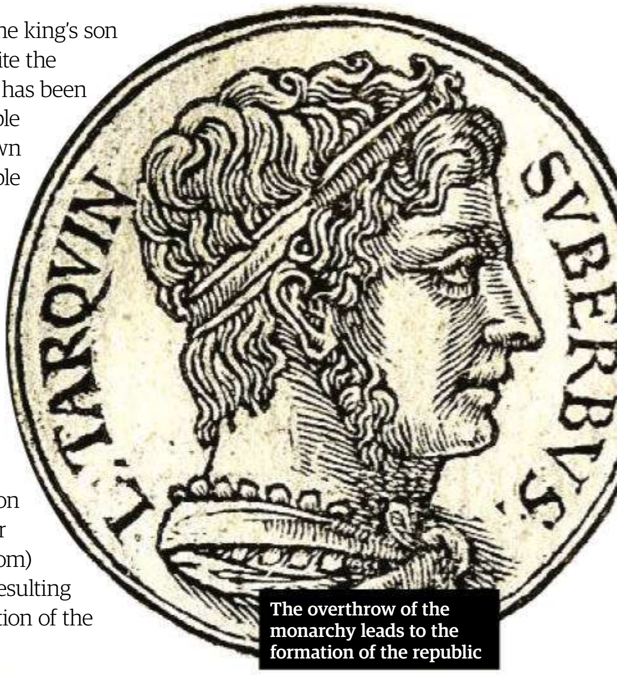
Perhaps the most important structure in Rome's history - the Forum - becomes the home of the Senate and many of the state's important legislative decisions. It is under Lucius Tarquinius Priscus' reign that construction on the Forum is finished. Each of the previous kings had made some pilgrimage in this area, from draining it of water to the building of simple temples. Priscus' contribution is to have the main rectangular building constructed and the entire plaza paved. The Forum becomes a symbol of Rome's democratic heartbeat. More contributions will be made to it over the course of history.

The Roman Forum is still standing today and remains one of the city's most iconic structures

The Roman monarchy is overthrown

509 BCE

The rape of Lucretia by the king's son provides the spark to ignite the political powder keg that has been filling for years. The people and the Senate have grown increasingly uncomfortable with the actions of the king, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, and his tyrannical rule. His obsession with architecture and building has largely exhausted the royal coffers and his foolish choice of military campaigns (based more on elevating his status rather than bettering the kingdom) leads the people to riot, resulting in his exile and the abolition of the monarchy itself.



The overthrow of the monarchy leads to the formation of the republic

Oldest Latin inscriptions
The very earliest examples of written Latin date back to around this time. It's possible this was when the Romans began actively recording their laws.
600 BCE

The Cloaca Maxima is built
Under the direction of Priscus, the first true Roman sewer is built beneath the centre of Rome. More primitive versions had been attempted, but this is the first true version.
578 BCE

Tullius builds city walls
In the first example of a Roman leader actively working to protect the city from foes, Tullius begins constructing walled defences around Rome.
550 BCE

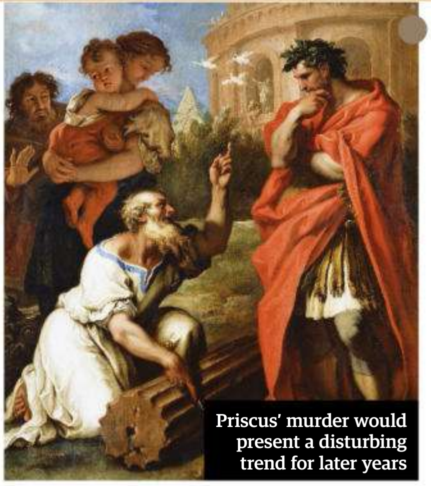
The raping of Lucretia led her to take her own life

616 BCE · 600 BCE · 579 BCE · 578 BCE · 575 BCE · 550 BCE · 535 BCE · 509 BCE

Lucius Tarquinius Priscus is elected
The fifth king of the Regal era, once again elected by the people, is found in the ambitious politician Lucius Tarquinius Priscus.
616 BCE

Servius Tullius becomes king
Following a period of time as regent, the Senate determines him a suitable candidate and electes him as the sixth king (and the second of Etruscan descent).
575 BCE

Superbus' son rapes a patrician
With Superbus already a deeply unpopular king known for his tyrannical rule, the news that his son Sextus has raped the patrician Lucretia is the final act that sends the kingdom into turmoil.
509 BCE

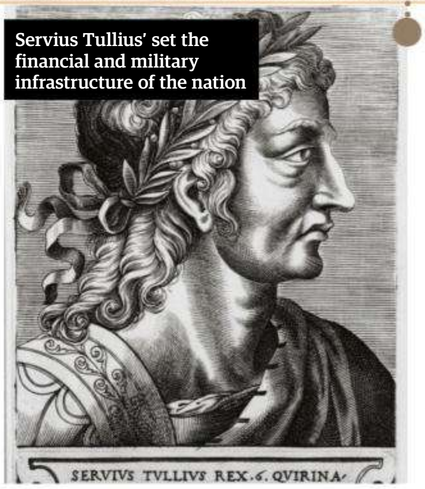


Priscus' murder would present a disturbing trend for later years

Priscus dies in a riot

579 BCE

In the first example of a Roman leader being murdered, Lucius Tarquinius Priscus dies during a riot organised by the son of the previous leader, Ancus Marcius. According to legend, the sons of Ancus Marcius believed the throne should have passed to them so they organised a riot among the people and struck Priscus over the head in the chaos. It's said Priscus' wife found her husband wounded but not dead, and used the time to name the Etruscan Servius Tullius as regent.


SERVIVS TVLLIVS REX.6. QVIRINA.

Servius Tullius' set the financial and military infrastructure of the nation

Servius Tullius is assassinated

535 BCE

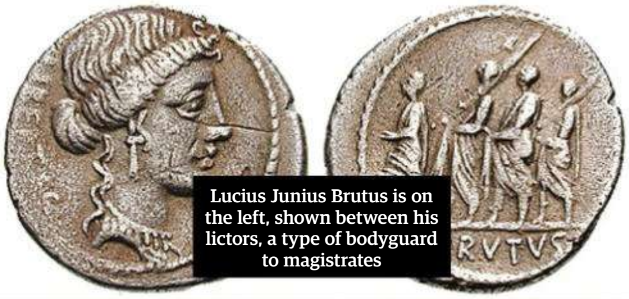
In another example of a disturbing trend in Roman succession, the king Servius Tullius is assassinated after 44 years of rule by his own daughter Tullia and her husband Tarquinius Superbus. Tullius had been a popular king, orchestrating a number of reforms. Superbus convinces the Senate to elect him king regardless and he becomes the seventh (and final) king of Rome. And so begins one of the least popular reigns…

The Roman Republic 509 – 27 BCE

Roman Republic established

509 BCE

Following the overthrow of the monarchy and the exile of Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, the Senate establishes a new republic state. In this new form, two leaders will rule cooperatively as consuls, elected for a single year each. With the formation of the republic, new powers are granted to the Senate and to the Plebeian Council, giving the people more power and influence over the laws that govern their home. It is decreed that Rome will never again recognise a king of Rome and subsequently elects Lucius Junius Brutus and Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus as its first joint consuls.

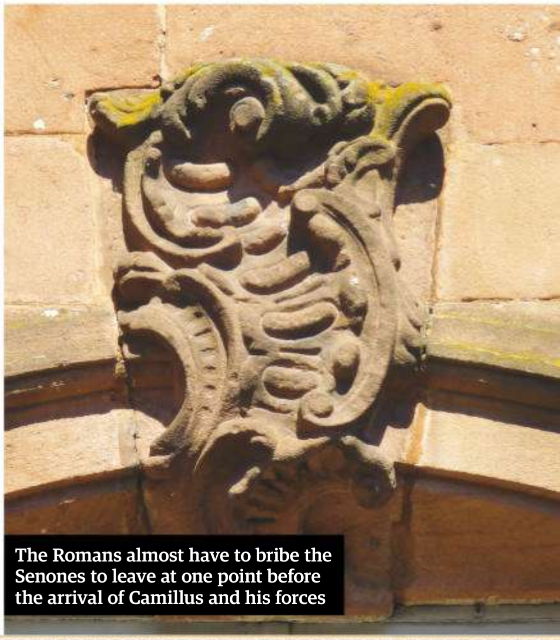


Lucius Junius Brutus is on the left, shown between his lictors, a type of bodyguard to magistrates

Senones sack Rome

390 BCE

In 390 BCE, Rome suffers its worst domestic disaster as the Senones reach and sack the city. On what is believed to be 18 July, the Romans march to meet the forces of the Senones, a large Gallic tribe that has invaded northern Italy. Despite their usual successes against the barbarians, the Romans are almost completely routed, leaving the path to Rome open for the Senones. The Senones find a city largely undefended, and therefore proceed to murder many of its elders, burn buildings to the ground and loot everything they can. Eventually, a Roman general called Camillus arrives with a relief force and destroys the Senones.



The Romans almost have to bribe the Senones to leave at one point before the arrival of Camillus and his forces

Battle of Silva Arsia
Republican forces meet those loyal to the deposed and exiled king at the Battle of Silva Arsia. Superbus' forces are defeated, but Lucius Junius Brutus is killed in battle.
509 BCE

Marriage between patricians/plebeians legalised
In another move created to foster the growing sense of equality between the high-ranking patricians and the normal plebeians, marriage between the two is legalised.
445 BCE

Roman soldiers earn a wage
For the first time in the history of Rome, Roman soldiers are finally granted and paid a standing wage. This is due to the wealth brought in by the army's growing list of conquests and new lands.
396 BCE

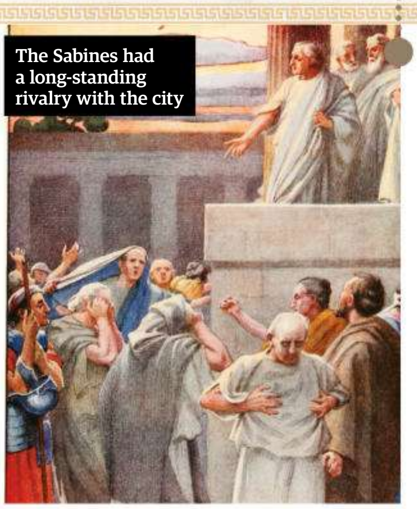
First Plebeian praetor elected
Despite the political struggles between patricians and plebeians, the very first plebeian praetor is elected into office.
337 BCE

509 BCE · 501 BCE · 449 BCE · 445 BCE · 443 BCE · 396 BCE · 390 BCE · 337 BCE · 293 BCE

Plebeian council given new powers
As further evidence of Rome's growing sense of democracy, the Plebeian Council (formerly known as the Curiate Assembly) is granted the power to help make Roman laws.
449 BCE

Three consular tribunes established
The offices of the *Tribuni militum consulari potestate* are established. They're a set of three councils that will hold the power of the consuls in order to settle a power struggle between plebeians and patricians.
443 BCE

Roman census is conducted
In and around 293 BCE, the Office of the Censor conducts an official census, which shows the population of Rome has swelled to around 300,000 people.
293 BCE

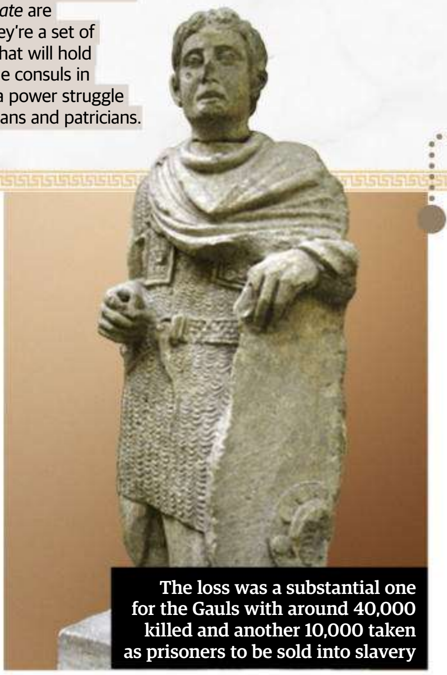


The Sabines had a long-standing rivalry with the city

Senate passes dictator law

501 BCE

Despite the realm's difficult past with a single man holding too much power, the Senate decides emergency laws are needed to grant temporary ultimate power to an individual in the event of a crisis. This is known as the *senatus consultum*. With the threat of a Sabine invasion looming, Titus Lartius and Postumus Cominius Auruncus select the former as dictator.



The loss was a substantial one for the Gauls with around 40,000 killed and another 10,000 taken as prisoners to be sold into slavery

Rome halts a Gallic invasion

225 BCE

The Battle of Telamon in 225 BCE halts a potentially disastrous Gallic invasion. Rome had formed a peace with a handful of the Gallic tribes to the north of Italy's borders. However, a new alliance of Gauls seemingly ignore this and begin moving troops into northern Italy with their eye on Rome. Roman forces under the command of consuls Gaius Atilius Regulus and Lucius Aemilius Papus march to Telamon and defeat the Gauls, extending Roman influence.

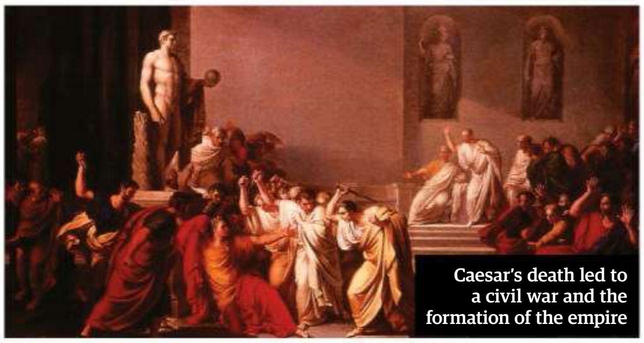
Battle of Arausio

105 BCE

The Battle of Arausio represents one of Rome's worst military defeats, and marks a turning point in the relationship between consuls. It also leads to many important reforms. The battle begins when a large Gallic tribe, the Cimbri, start migrating through Gaul, which causes an imbalance in the hierarchy of the tribes. With the Cimbri now growing in number, two armies under the command of consul Quintus Servilius Caepio and consul Gnaeus Mallius Maximus arrive to meet them. However, tactical disagreements between the two leaders have disastrous results, with over 100,000 Roman soldiers dying.

The defeat at Arausio was a wake-up call for Rome, and led to serious reforms

© Karl Hammer



Caesar's death led to a civil war and the formation of the empire

Julius Caesar is assassinated

44 BCE

In the build-up to his assassination, Julius Caesar rises from consul and member of the First Triumvirate to the most powerful seat in the land. He is not, as is sometimes incorrectly assumed, an emperor, but a dictator who has been voted into that position by the Senate in 49 BCE and then again in 45 BCE. The Senate passes a vote making him *dictator perpetuo*, a role that makes many senators who had not voted in his favour fearful that Caesar will install himself as king. On the Ides of March, a conspiracy is put into motion that sees Caesar betrayed by his allies and stabbed to death in the Theatre of Pompey.

Province of Macedonia established

After a series of long wars with the tribes of Macedonia, the lands are eventually absorbed into the republic and made a province of Rome.

146 BCE

The Social War

The Social War erupts when a series of Roman cities (known collectively as the Latins) rebel against the inequality in land ownership and wealth between Rome and its allies.

91 – 88 BCE

First Triumvirate formed

The First Triumvirate, an alliance between three of Rome's most powerful politicians (Julius Caesar, Pompey and Marcus Licinius Crassus) is formed.

59 BCE

225 BC
146 BC
121 BCE
105 BCE
91 BCE
73 BCE
59 BCE
44 BCE
30 BCE
27 BCE

First / Senatus consultum ultimum/

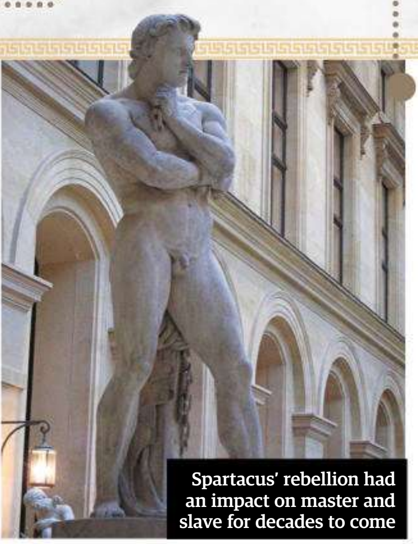
In 121 BCE, the first *Senatus consultum ultimum* is passed by the Senate, granting consul Lucius Opimius emergency powers to defeat the forces of Gaius Gracchus.

121 BCE

Province of Egypt established

Around 30 BCE, Egypt's dominance of North Africa has faded and it is absorbed into Rome, becoming a Roman province as a result.

30 BCE

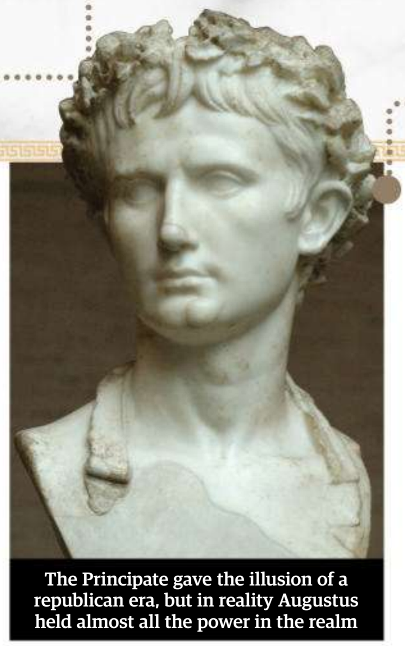


Spartacus' rebellion had an impact on master and slave for decades to come

Third Servile War begins

73 – 71 BCE

The third and final slave rebellion, which is led by Spartacus, is the only servile uprising to threaten the stability of Rome itself. A band of escaped gladiators begins swelling with slaves who wish to know true freedom. Under the leadership of slave and gladiator Spartacus, the loosely armed rebels defeat a number of Roman forces before Roman commander Marcus Licinius Crassus crushes the uprising.



The Principate gave the illusion of a republican era, but in reality Augustus held almost all the power in the realm

Augustus is made emperor

27 BCE

Following the death of his great-uncle Julius Caesar, Gaius Octavius forms the Second Triumvirate with Mark Antony and Marcus Lepidus to find his assassins. The alliance causes a civil war. Lepidus is eventually driven into exile and Mark Antony commits suicide following his defeat at the Battle of Actium. Still granted the ultimate power of office by the Senate, Augustus begins creating a framework with the Senate – the beginning of the principate and the empire itself.

The Roman Empire 27 BCE – 476 CE

Roman conquest of Britain

43 CE

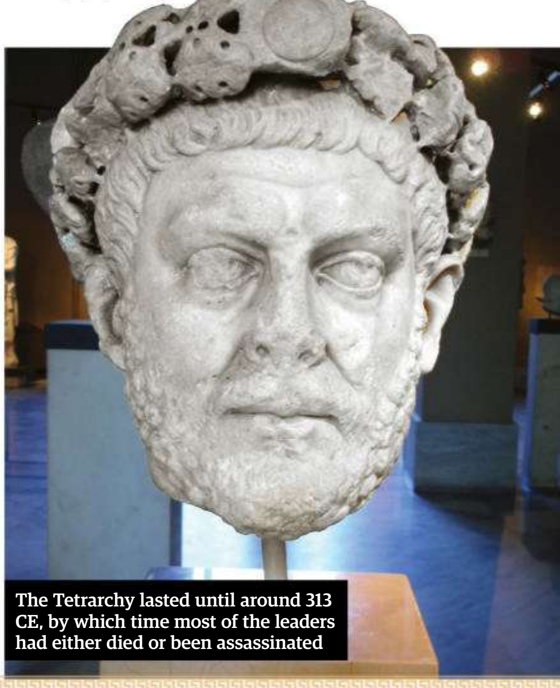
Prior to Emperor Claudius' campaign to conquer Britannia once and for all, the Romans have enjoyed a relatively healthy trading relationship with the tribes of Britain since Julius Caesar's first settlements in 55 BCE. However, the Catuvellauni have taken over from the Trinovantes as the most powerful kingdom in southeastern Britain. The Catuvellauni begin encroaching on the land of the Roman-loyal Atrebates, forcing Rome to send troops to pacify Britannia once and for all. The campaign eventually takes the Romans through England and into Scotland.

Britain provided considerable resources for the empire, but it was a difficult province to control

Diocletian established the Tetrarchy

293 CE

Following almost 50 year of chaos, civil war and divided states, the politician Diocletian is recognised as emperor by the Senate and establishes a new form of governance - the Tetrarchy. Alongside three other co-emperors, he divides the Roman Empire into four separate states to be governed by each individual emperor with mutual cooperation between all four sections of the realm. The concept, for a time, proves a success, with every state having its own capital and standing armies. However, despite the joint nature of the nation, Diocletian is ultimately the supreme leader.



The Tetrarchy lasted until around 313 CE, by which time most of the leaders had either died or been assassinated

Senate grants Augustus new titles
As part of Octavian's new position as the ultimate ruler of Rome, the Senate grants him the titles of Augustus, Majestic and Princeps.
27 BCE

Great Fire of Rome
Legend says that the fire that consumed a significant proportion of Rome's infrastructure was in fact set by emperor Nero himself. Nero blames the Christians, leading to a bloody purge.
64 CE

Colosseum is completed
In 80 BCE, the largest amphitheatre ever built is finally finished in the heart of Rome. It can house 50,000 spectators and becomes a symbol of Rome's endless passion for bloodsports.
80 CE

Crisis of the Third Century
The Crisis of the Third Century is a half-century-long period of civil war and turmoil as 26 different emperors are crowned and Rome splits into three different states.
235 CE

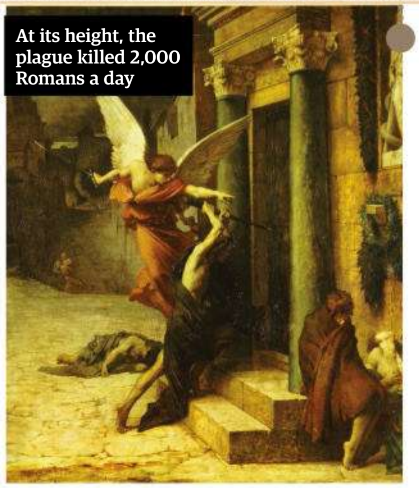
Battle of Carthage
Forces loyal to the joint emperors of Gordian I and his son Gordian II are destroyed by those belonging to Emperor Maximinus Thrax. Gordian I is killed and Gordian II soon commits suicide.
238 CE

27 BCE · 43 CE · 60 CE · 64 CE · 80 CE · 122 CE · 165 CE · 235 CE · 238 CE · 260 CE

Boudicca's revolt in Britannia
One of the biggest revolts in Roman Britain is led by the queen of the Iceni, Boudicca. She leads a force of 100,000 men but is ultimately defeated.
60 CE

Hadrian's Wall is started
In order to keep the barbarians of Scotland and the north of Britannia at bay, Emperor Hadrian orders a wall to be constructed. It becomes known as Hadrian's Wall and survives to this day.
122 CE

Emperor Valerian taken prisoner
In a shock development for the Roman Empire, the emperor Valerian is taken captive during a battle with the Sassanid Persian Empire. He dies in captivity.
260 CE



At its height, the plague killed 2,000 Romans a day

The Antonine Plague strikes

165 CE

One of the worst pandemics to ever ravage Rome, the Antonine Plague (likely a form of smallpox or perhaps an early form of measles) ends up claiming the lives of over 5 million Romans. It is thought the plague was brought back with troops returning from the Near East. The plague, which rages on and off for around 15 years, even claims the life of the emperor Lucius Verus.

Constantine's reforms changed Rome forever - including a new coinage to battle inflation and the relocation of the capital to Byzantium

Constantine becomes first Christian emperor

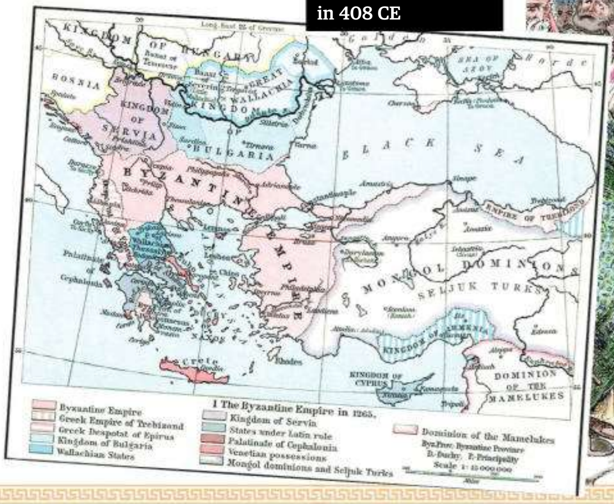
306 CE

Christians had an uneasy relationship with the religion of Rome. In fact, as recently as Diocletian, the Christian community had been demonised and purged. However, that all changes when Constantine - the son of one of the first members of the Tetrarchy - becomes the sole emperor. He sets about reforming the national mindset and even chairs the First Council of Nicaea in 325 CE where an assembly of bishops is called to create a consensus of modern Christianity.

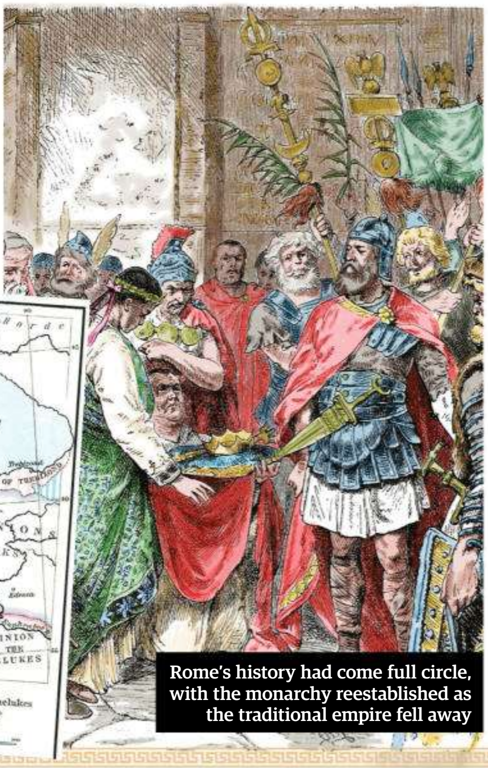
Rome is divided into two empires

395 CE

A direct result of Constantine's desire to rule the Roman Empire from the east in Byzantium, it is decided that the realm should be operated by two imperial administrations. The empire is initially divided by Theodosius I upon his deathbed, carving the realm into the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern Roman Empire and granting rule to his two sons. As a result, Arcadius becomes *augustus* of the eastern Byzantine Empire and his brother Honorius becomes *augustus* of the Western Empire. To the Romans, the country is far from divided; instead, the notion of two separate governments looking after one country is seen as the norm.


BLACK SEA
BYZANTINE EMPIRE
MONGOL DOMINIONS
SELJUK TURKS
KINGDOM OF ARMENIA
Crete
Rhodes
KINGDOM OF CYPRUS
DOMINION OF THE MAMELUKES
I The Byzantine Empire in 1265.
Byzantine Empire
Greek Empire of Trebizond
Greek Despotat of Epirus
Kingdom of Bulgaria
Wallachian States
Kingdom of Servia
States under Latin rule
Palatinate of Cephalonia
Venetian possessions
Mongol dominions and Seljuk Turks
Dominion of the Mamelukes
Byz.Prov. Byzantine Province
D. Duchy. P. Principality
Scale 1: 15 000 000

For a time, the governance of the Western Roman Empire fell to regent Stilicho before his ineptitude at the task led him to arrest and execution in 408 CE



Rome's history had come full circle, with the monarchy reestablished as the traditional empire fell away

Western Roman Empire falls

476 CE

By the middle of the 5th century, the Western Roman Empire is a shadow of its former self. The position of emperor no longer wields the power and respect it once did, and the empire lacks the stability of the Byzantine Empire to the east. The current emperor, Romulus Augustulus, had been installed by his father a year prior, but he doesn't have the support of the people or the Senate. This leads to the military commander Odoacer leading a revolt that removes the emperor and his installation as patrician. With the support of the Senate, he is the first king of Italy.

Visigoths sack Rome
For the first time in 800 years, Rome is successfully overrun by an enemy. The city is sacked and almost burned to the ground by the Visigoths, led by their king, Alaric.
410 CE

293 CE
306 CE
330 CE
395 CE
410 CE
476 CE

Capital moved from Rome to Constantinople
As part of Constantine the Great's systematic upheaval of Roman values, he abandons Rome and sets up his new capital, Constantinople, in modern-day Istanbul.
330 CE

> "The empire was ahead of its time, with even the Dark Ages failing to eliminate its mark"

The lasting effect of the Roman Empire

The Roman Kingdom, Republic and Empire were very powerful, so it's no surprise to see the imprint of that nation today. From language to infrastructure, the empire was a state far ahead of its time, with even the regressive years of the Dark Ages failing to eliminate its mark.

Latin, the official language of the empire, didn't die with the realm but instead flourished. It was adopted as the official language of the Catholic Church and became the *ipso facto* language of the sciences. It can be found in English, German, Dutch and many other modern dialects.

Our calendars owe their structure and style to the Romans – the Julian calendar, introduced by Julius Caesar, made the year 365 days long and divided it into 12 months. It was also the Romans who chose to begin the year in January and add a leap year every four years in February. The Romans even introduced the seven-day week, with the planets forming their names (except Sunday, which has its origins in Christianity).

The Romans' use of democracy and forums is still seen among countless nations, while its embrace of Christianity under Constantine the Great helped secure Rome as the home of the Catholic Church. Elsewhere, the Romans' use of sewers, aqueducts and roads showed the rest of the world how to build lasting infrastructure.

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Expansion of the Empire

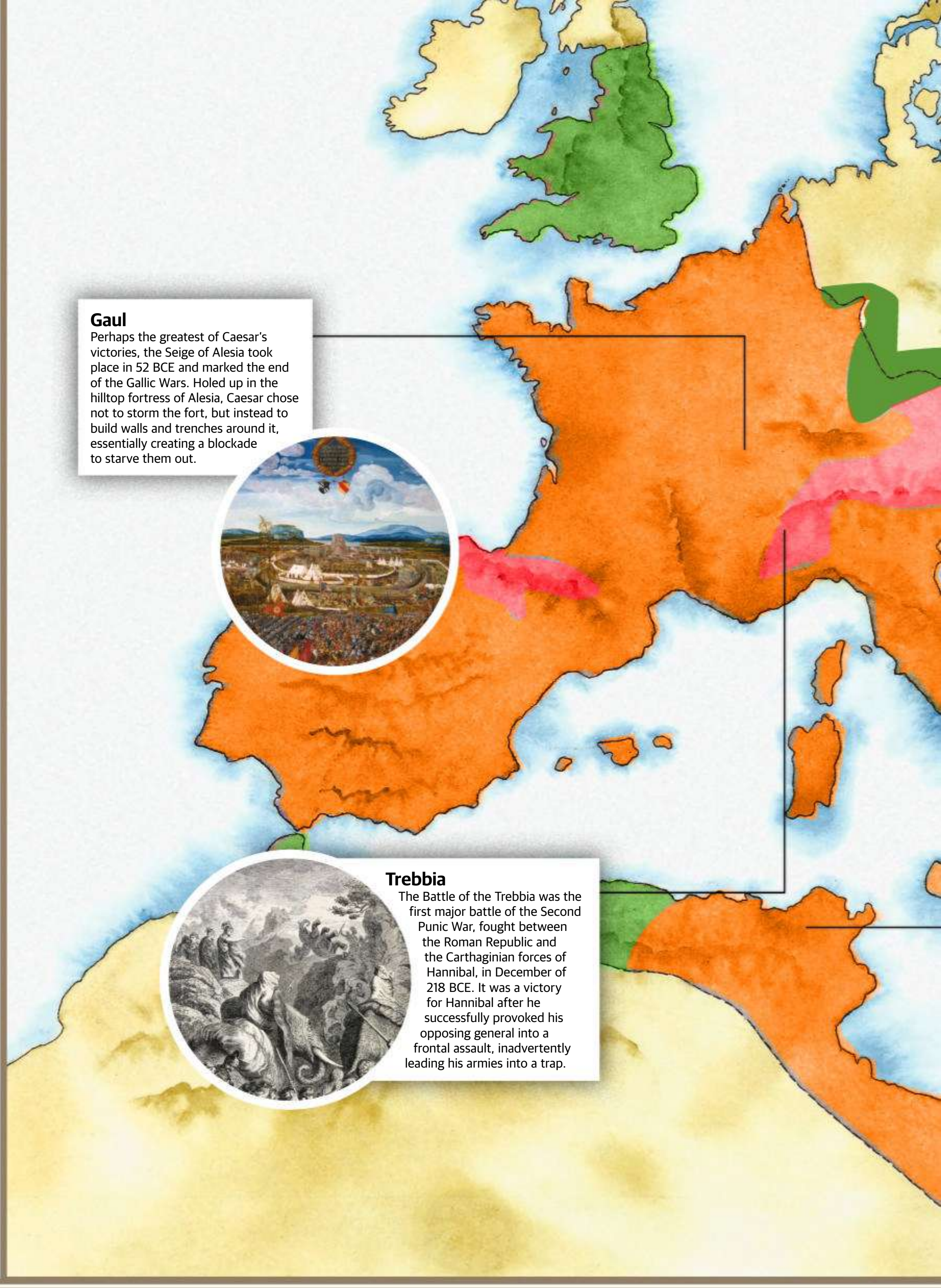
How Rome came, saw and conquered: the rundown of all the territories Rome gained over time

5TH CENTURY BCE	ITALIAN PENINSULA
4TH CENTURY BCE	SUDAN
4TH CENTURY BCE	TUNISIA
4TH CENTURY BCE	MOROCCO
4TH CENTURY BCE	SOUTHERN FRANCE
4TH CENTURY BCE	SPAIN
1ST CENTURY BCE	NORTHERN FRANCE
1ST CENTURY BCE	GREECE
1ST CENTURY BCE	TURKEY
1ST CENTURY BCE	EGYPT
1ST CENTURY CE	BRITAIN
2ND CENTURY CE	DACIA (ROMANIA)
2ND CENTURY CE	ARMENIA
2ND CENTURY CE	THRACE (BULGARIA)

🟧 *Roman territories up to the death of Caesar (44 BCE)*

🟥 *Additional Roman territories up to the death of Augustus (14 CE)*

🟩 *Additional Roman territories up to the death of Trajan (117 CE)*

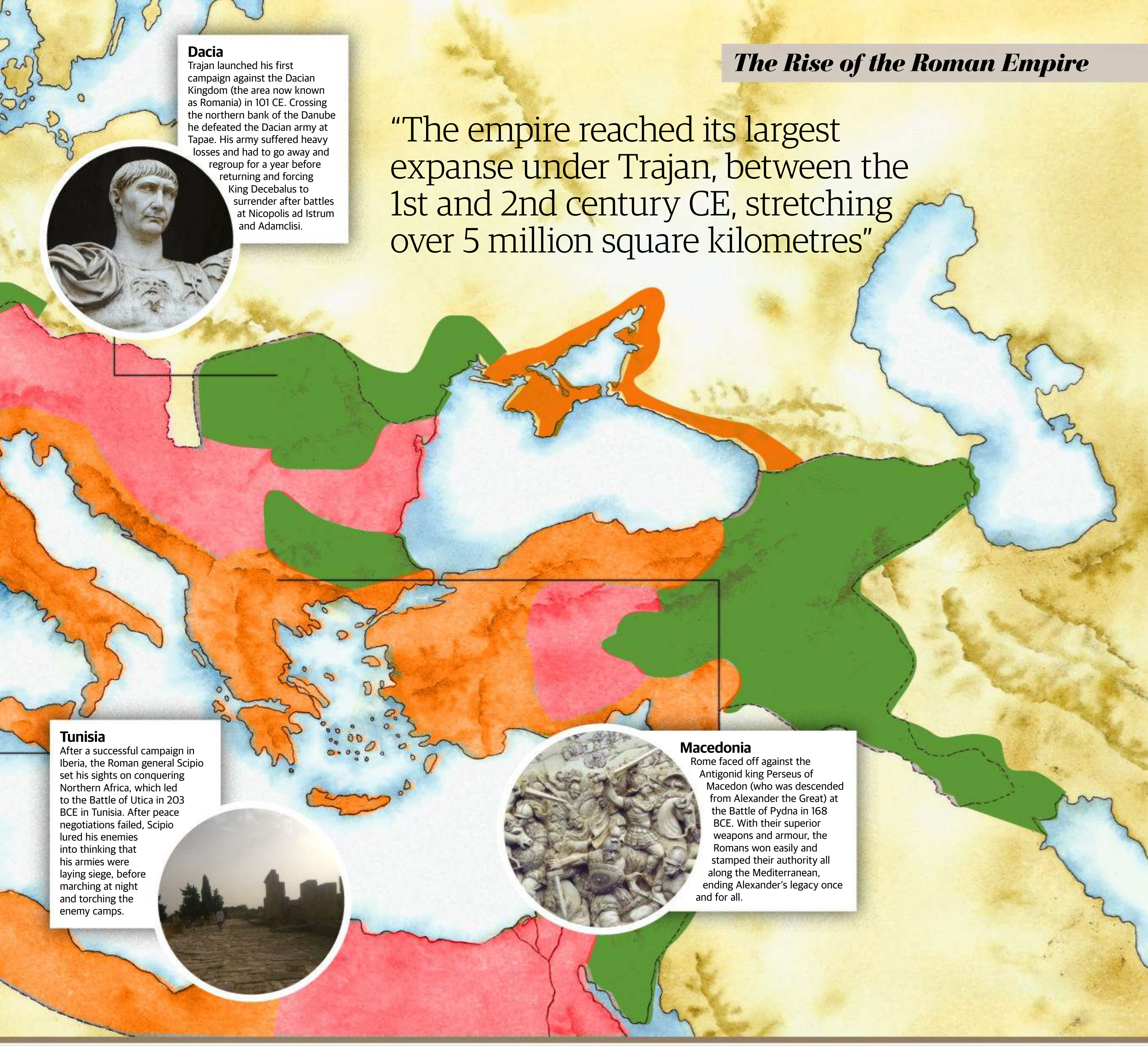


Gaul
Perhaps the greatest of Caesar's victories, the Seige of Alesia took place in 52 BCE and marked the end of the Gallic Wars. Holed up in the hilltop fortress of Alesia, Caesar chose not to storm the fort, but instead to build walls and trenches around it, essentially creating a blockade to starve them out.

Trebbia
The Battle of the Trebbia was the first major battle of the Second Punic War, fought between the Roman Republic and the Carthaginian forces of Hannibal, in December of 218 BCE. It was a victory for Hannibal after he successfully provoked his opposing general into a frontal assault, inadvertently leading his armies into a trap.

The Rise of the Roman Empire

How Rome built its empire, negotiating or seizing the largest population of any unified political entity in the West



Dacia

Trajan launched his first campaign against the Dacian Kingdom (the area now known as Romania) in 101 CE. Crossing the northern bank of the Danube he defeated the Dacian army at Tapae. His army suffered heavy losses and had to go away and regroup for a year before returning and forcing King Decebalus to surrender after battles at Nicopolis ad Istrum and Adamclisi.

Tunisia

After a successful campaign in Iberia, the Roman general Scipio set his sights on conquering Northern Africa, which led to the Battle of Utica in 203 BCE in Tunisia. After peace negotiations failed, Scipio lured his enemies into thinking that his armies were laying siege, before marching at night and torching the enemy camps.

Macedonia

Rome faced off against the Antigonid king Perseus of Macedon (who was descended from Alexander the Great) at the Battle of Pydna in 168 BCE. With their superior weapons and armour, the Romans won easily and stamped their authority all along the Mediterranean, ending Alexander's legacy once and for all.

> "The empire reached its largest expanse under Trajan, between the 1st and 2nd century CE, stretching over 5 million square kilometres"

The Roman Empire was one of the largest empires in history, comprising of territories throughout Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. Expansion of the empire was mostly accomplished under the republic (between 509 - 27 BCE), before the Roman Empire was established. During this period in time, Rome's control expanded from the immediate surroundings of the city to control most of the Mediterranean world through forming alliances or taking the territories by brute force. It wasn't long before the entire Italian Peninsula was under the control of the republic, and by the following century its overwhelming dominance had widened all the way to include North Africa, Spain and Southern France (Gaul).

By the end of the 1st century BCE, the republic had expanded to include all of France, Greece and most of the Eastern Mediterranean. However, by that point civil wars were breaking out due to internal struggles, and the republic's troubles culminated with the assassination of Julius Caesar - after which the republic became the empire.

The exact date of the political transition is down to interpretation. Some put it at the point when Caesar was appointed dictator for life in 44 BCE, others when Mark Antony and Cleopatra were defeated at the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE. The most popular opinion, however, was that the republic ended when Octavian was granted extraordinary powers by the Senate and adopted the prestigious title of *Augustus* in 27 BCE.

Although he gave birth to the empire, its dominance in terms of land mass didn't expand a great deal during the reign of Augustus, and when he died in 14 CE, his contribution had mainly been administrative. Augustus' regime catalogued people and places within the empire and displayed a detailed map of the known world to the public.

The Roman Empire reached its largest expanse under Emperor Trajan, between the 1st and 2nd century CE, stretching out over 5 million square kilometres and the modern equivalent of 40 countries. At around 476 CE, the empire began to crumble. Although the eastern half continued to rule for another 1,000 years, the Western Empire struggled to defend its borders and maintain its political grip on the Western world.

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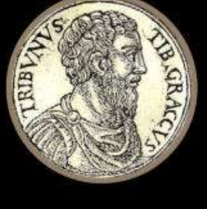
EUROPE, 133 – 27 BCE

The Fall of the Roman Republic

Timeline

133 BCE



The murder of tribune Tiberius Gracchus sparks a chain of events that ultimately leads to the downfall of the Roman Republic.
133 BCE

107 BCE

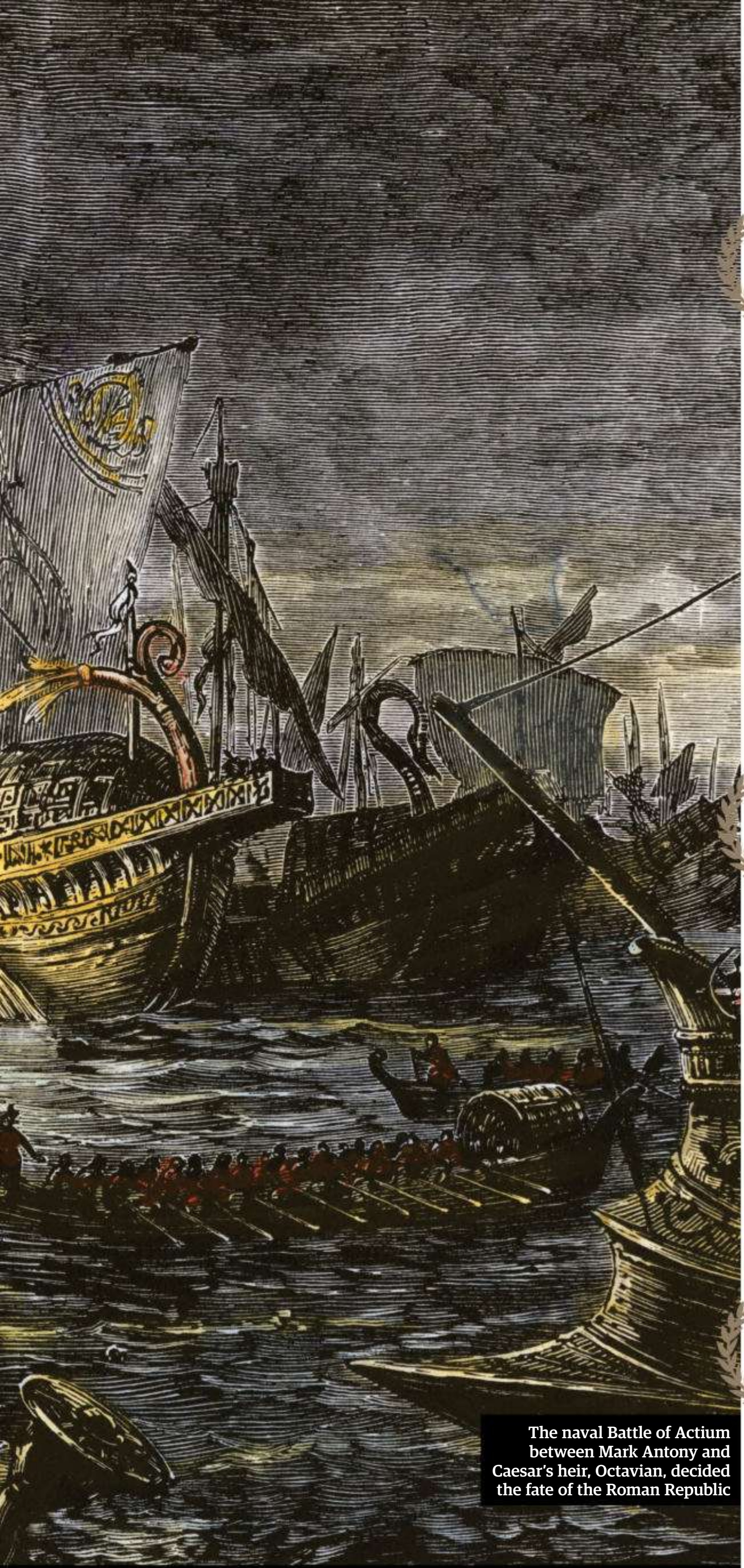
General Gaius Marius becomes consul and abolishes the requirement to own property before being able to join the army.
107 BCE

82 BCE

Following his rebellion, Sulla defeats the remnants of Marius' supporters at the Battle of the Colline Gate to secure power.
1 November 82 BCE

45 BCE

Caesar's decisive victory in Munda, Spain, ends the civil war and enables him to install himself as ruler of Rome.
17 March 45 BCE



The naval Battle of Actium between Mark Antony and Caesar's heir, Octavian, decided the fate of the Roman Republic

What was it?

After centuries of peace and prosperity, aided by almost untrammelled expansion across the Mediterranean, the Roman Republic was plunged into crisis in 133 BCE following the murder of popular official Tiberius Gracchus, a killing allegedly sanctioned by the Senate. The following years were marked by social unrest as politicians battled it out. General Gaius Marius, a successful military campaigner, seized the office of consul in 107 BCE.

In 88 BCE, following a challenge for power from Lucius Sulla, Marius' quaestor (state treasurer), who subsequently rebelled against Rome, a reign of terror ensued that purged many of the people's representatives.

Sulla died in 78 BCE only to be replaced by Gnaeus Pompeius, better known as Pompey the Great, who would later serve in Rome's First Triumvirate alongside Marcus Crassus and Julius Caesar.

Pompey and Caesar quickly became entrenched in their respective positions, leading to a series of civil wars that would culminate in Octavian (Caesar's adopted heir) becoming the first emperor of Rome in 27 BCE, heralding the end of the republic.

What were the consequences?

The fall of the Roman Republic witnessed the decline of a democratic system that had governed the state since its foundation in 509 BCE following the overthrow of the hated Roman monarchy.

After the disposal of the kings, the title of consul was introduced and shared between two men. More power was also granted to the Senate, and tribunes (officials) were elected to represent the people. However, this style of governance was changed by the republic's demise.

The social unrest and military opportunism that blighted Rome in the 1st century BCE and led to Julius Caesar eventually snatching power effectively put an end to a system of rule that had heeded the requests of the people. And while Caesar's rapacious ambition would lead to his downfall, his heir, Octavian, swiftly picked up the mantle to establish total power as emperor in 27 BCE. An emperor would rule Rome until 476 CE.

Who was involved?

Lucius Sulla

139 – 78 BCE

Upon consolidating power in 82 BCE, Sulla ruled as a dictator, purging many elected officials and stripping others of power.

Julius Caesar

100 – 44 BCE

After crushing the remains of Pompey's men at the Battle of Munda, Caesar took control of Rome, eventually becoming dictator.

Emperor Augustus

63 BCE – 14 CE

Victory over Mark Antony at Actium allowed Octavian to cement his grip on power and later become the first emperor of Rome.

44 BCE

Julius Caesar, having recently proclaimed himself dictator for life, is stabbed to death by a host of senators.
15 March 44 BCE

27 BCE

Caesar's heir becomes Emperor Augustus, having dispatched Mark Antony's forces four years earlier in the Final War of the Roman Republic.
16 January 27 BCE

© Images; Alamy (main, Lucius Sulla, 1 November 82 BCE, 17 March 45 BCE), Getty Images (16 January 27 BCE)

How the Romans Lived

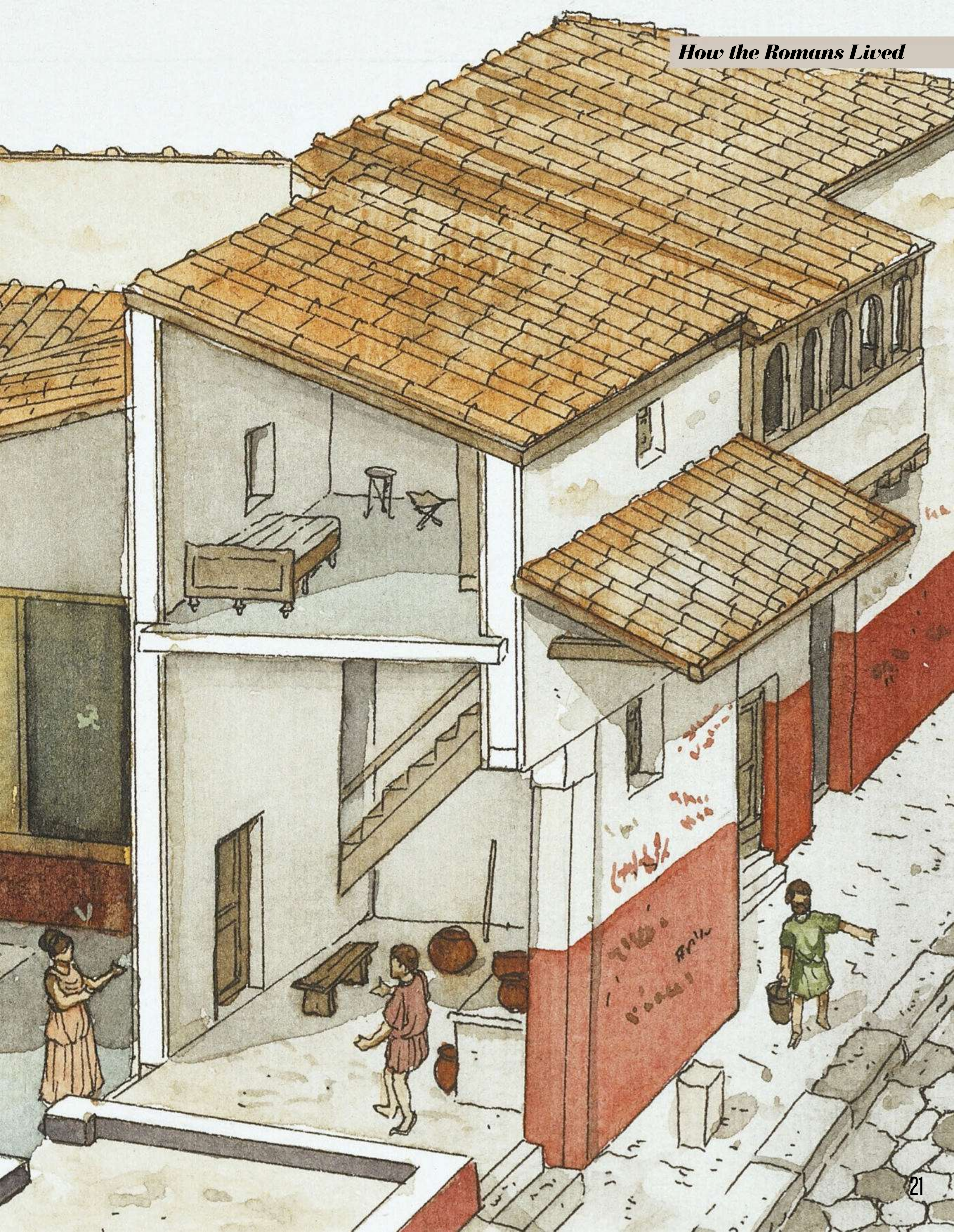
All walks of life filled the streets of Ancient Rome, and for the poorer people of society the empire was very different to those at the top

Work hard, play hard. That appears to be the mantra by which a lot of Romans lived their lives. There's a general impression that the Romans were a wealthy, articulate bunch, who had splendid villas and clothes. However, that, in truth, is only half the story. As in any society, the normal men and women who lived and worked in Rome (plebeians) led very different lives to those at the top of the tree (patricians), residing in homes that were a world apart from the nobility and the elite and having differing levels of access to education and health provisions.

Today, most of the physical evidence of the lower class' existence has crumbled away. Their poorly built homes and unwritten stories have been lost to time. But historians have still been able to piece together the structure of Roman life: how they ate, what they wore, where they bathed and how they were schooled.

We also know that wealth was the key towards a good life, even for slaves who found they could amass money and sometimes buy their freedom.

> "The normal men and women who lived and worked in Rome led very different lives to those at the top of the tree"



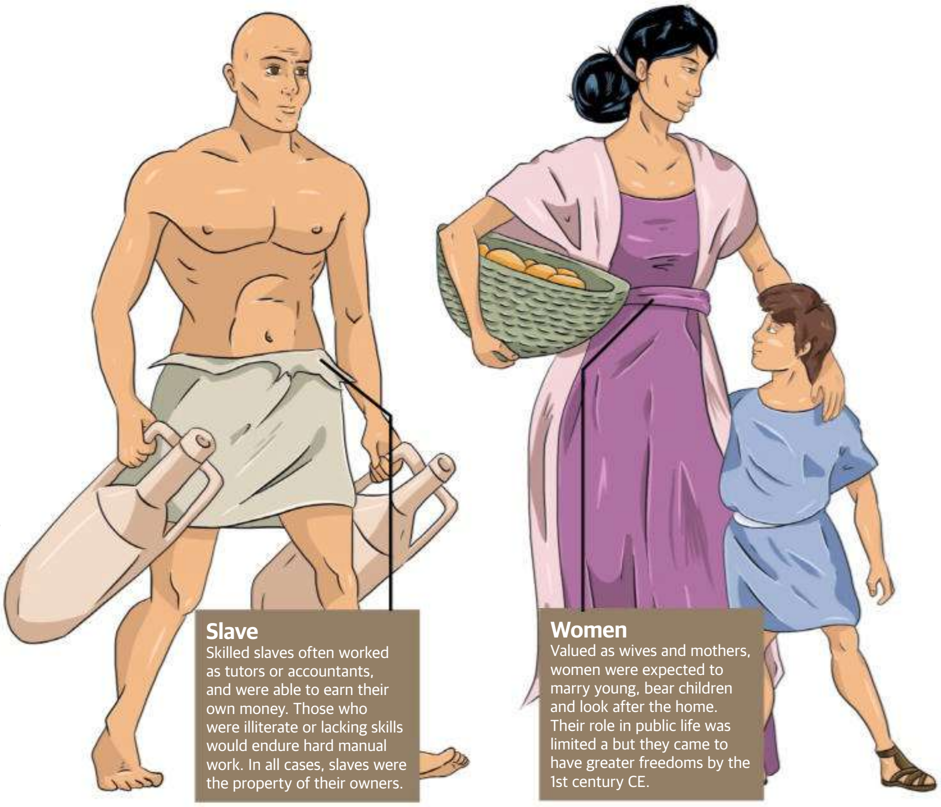
Class act: how the Romans were divided

Roman society was a complex system made up of a strong social pecking order that went far beyond a simplistic dichotomy of very rich and incredibly poor. While we are familiar with the privileged lives of the emperors, senators and the equestrians below them, perhaps the most intriguing class of all was that of the plebeian.

The men and women of the lower classes were the beating heart of the empire but there were few comforts their work afforded them, and this didn't go unnoticed. A great dispute arose between the patricians and the plebeians in 494 BCE and it raged intermittently for 200 years. In that year, the plebeians threatened to leave Rome – a withdrawal of manpower which would have proved devastating – and concessions were introduced. However, in the minds of the Romans there was still a difference in social standing, and the further down the chain you belonged, the worse your life became.

Beneath the plebeians in the Roman class hierarchy were the freedmen and the slaves. The latter did not hold citizenship, while the former had either been granted their freedom or had purchased it themselves.

Being a citizen afforded a Roman a relatively comfortable life and certain rights, making it possible to vote, own property, lawfully marry, make contracts, sue, and attain a lawyer in court to avoid torture or death for any crime except treason. However, women had a more limited citizenship.



Slave
Skilled slaves often worked as tutors or accountants, and were able to earn their own money. Those who were illiterate or lacking skills would endure hard manual work. In all cases, slaves were the property of their owners.

Women
Valued as wives and mothers, women were expected to marry young, bear children and look after the home. Their role in public life was limited a but they came to have greater freedoms by the 1st century CE.

Life among the classes

In such a cut-throat city, how did the patricians, equestrians and plebeians navigate through Roman life?

If there was a social leveller in Rome, then it would be found in the public toilets, where 95% of the million-strong population sat, chatted and did their foulest of business. Within the latrine walls, the Romans were at their most naked, with their tunics pulled up and squatting over the large holes cut in wood or stone, and their privacy completely whipped away. They wiped their bottoms with water-soaked sponges attached to sticks, which they then discarded into the Roman sewer system.

Back out on the streets, however, life was very different. There the class system was very much in place. At the top end of the scale were the higher ranks of Romans: the emperor, senators – who wore tunics with broad stripes called laticlavi – and an economic class of equestrians – who wore a tunic with narrow stripes called the angusti clavi. But further down, there were the ordinary people of Rome, wrapped in a long semicircle of woollen cloth called a toga, as well as the freedmen and the slaves. However the freedmen often occupied roles in the Imperial Palace, and so could improve their social standing and gain quality clothing.

The plebeians saw Rome as it really was, away from the ornate, marbled villas and the grand buildings enjoyed by the privileged. Their warts-and-all view was of the cramped apartments in which they lived, multiple people to a room, in crowded areas that would absorb ever greater numbers year after year. For them Roman life was the narrow streets between the squalid high-rise garrets, the busy taverns and visiting the ground-floor shops (tabernae) to buy food and essentials.

These areas may have wafted with the smell of fresh bread and exotic foods, but there would also have been the unmistakable stench of sweat, blood and human waste. Rome was usually a rowdy city, with fighting in the public areas, rows among residents, evidence of domestic violence and the ever-present risk of fire. Any moments of bliss could be interrupted by the emptying of a chamber pot out of a window to the ground below, particularly in the roughest part of town (Subura).

Rome certainly wasn't a city for the feint hearted, and the governors and senators had a constant battle to quash plebeian revolts and disharmony. Providing a weekly ration of grain and entertainment seemed satisfy the lower classes and the organisers or benefactors of festivals were always held in high esteem.

Rome was seen as a ready-made job market for the poorer man, its streets perceived to be paved with gold as much as dirt and disease. The many building projects meant there was always a pressing need for labour, so plenty of people emigrated there looking to work. After its founding, the city of Rome fast became a bustling multicultural metropolis, but it was impossible to build enough quality accommodation for everyone.

The harsh living quarters were generally as good as it got for hundreds of thousands of people, and for that reason, they tended to live most of their life outside of their apartments. The whole of Rome became their home.

With so much time spent in the company of others, the plebeians were known for being sociable and rowdy. They were also mostly tolerant of different races and religions. Incomers were integrated into the city just as they had been from the moment Romulus and Remus' founded Rome as a city of outsiders, inviting criminals and runaways to seek asylum. People quickly got involved in the busy Roman way of life.

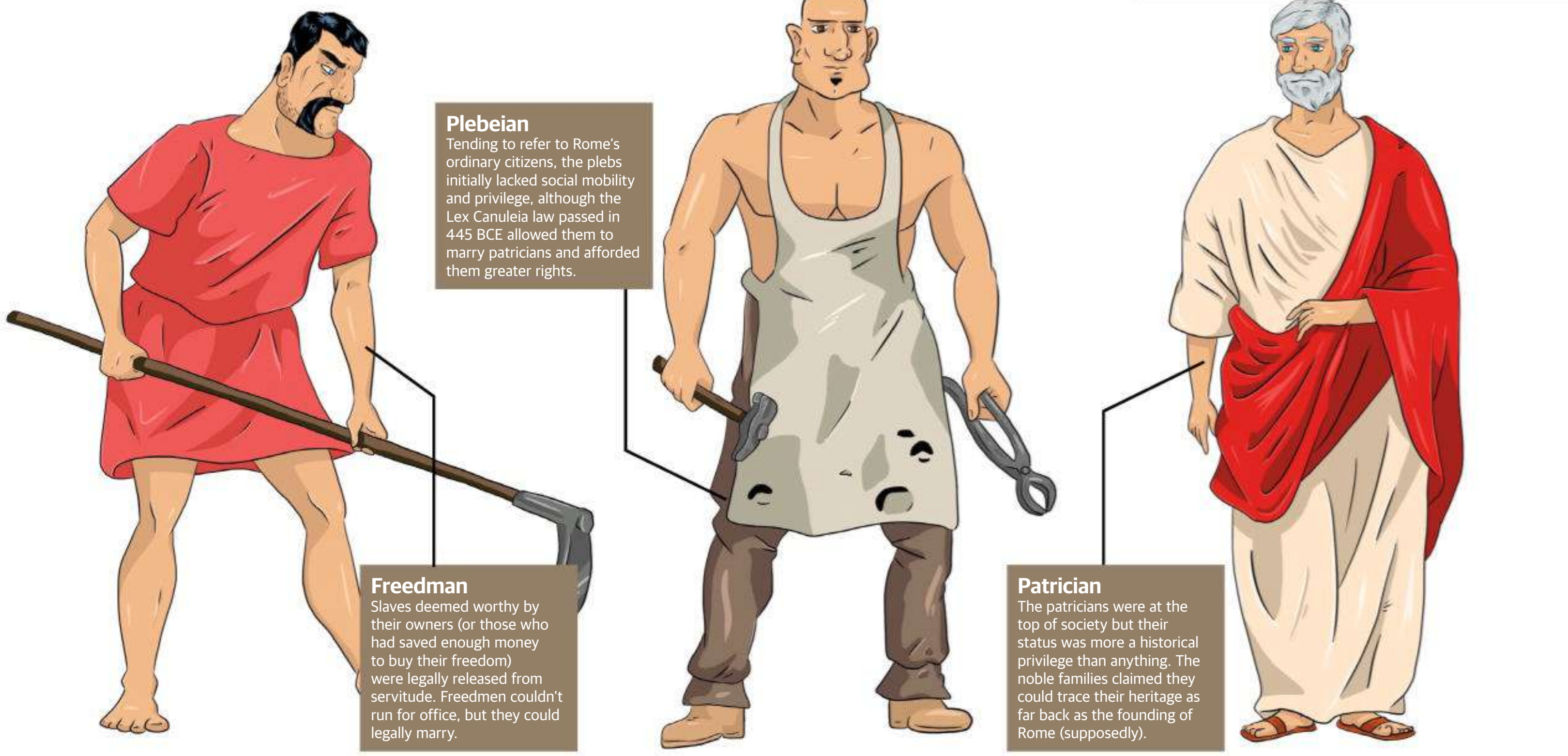
Workers would rise early, toiling through the day for a small

MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO

3 Jan 106 – 7 Dec 43 BCE

Brief Bio

Since a large factor in a Roman's 'nobility' was their ancestry, plebs who amassed money were still not considered patricians. The inability for Rome to shake off traditional divisions resulted in the creation of an equestrian class, acting as our equivalent of the middle class today. Cicero was an equestrian by birth, but he managed to become a senator through political connections and his notoriety as a great lawyer and orator. While his speeches and writing greatly influenced Roman politics, he could fall prone to snobbishness, once speaking of the *sordida plebs* – the great unwashed – a turn of phrase still common today. He was also an outspoken critic of Caesar.



Freedman
Slaves deemed worthy by their owners (or those who had saved enough money to buy their freedom) were legally released from servitude. Freedmen couldn't run for office, but they could legally marry.

Plebeian
Tending to refer to Rome's ordinary citizens, the plebs initially lacked social mobility and privilege, although the Lex Canuleia law passed in 445 BCE allowed them to marry patricians and afforded them greater rights.

Patrician
The patricians were at the top of society but their status was more a historical privilege than anything. The noble families claimed they could trace their heritage as far back as the founding of Rome (supposedly).

amount of money and seeking ways to supplement their income elsewhere. Children would also work, the boys serving apprenticeships and the girls carrying out domestic chores under the watchful eyes of their mothers or a *domina* (female master) – usually splendidly dressed in their stolas given shape by a belt called a zona. Schools were mainly fee-paying and were reserved for the rich and privileged. However, poorer families would look to educate their sons themselves, fathers teaching sons the tools of their trade.

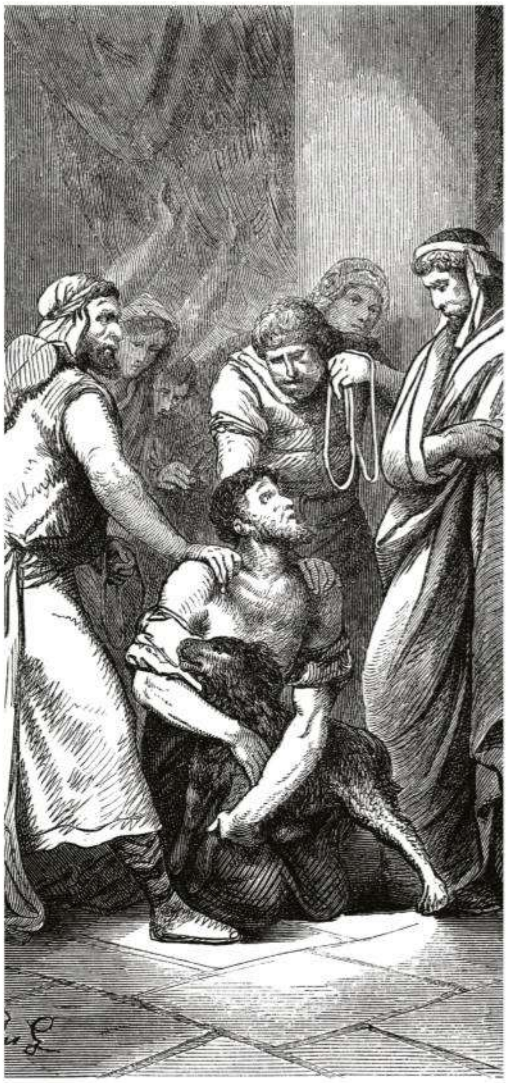
Generations of the poor, therefore, grew up largely illiterate but skilled none-the-less. By the age of 14 (12 for girls), the men would be married, their coming of age marked by a hearty banquet. Boys could be drafted into the military to help the Roman's to conquer and control far-flung lands and girls were used to manoeuvre through social circles, and join powerful families.

The soldiers also served another purpose. They were able to capture slaves and bring them back to Rome. Far from being chosen on racial grounds, slaves were generally taken instead for their strength, intelligence, practical skills or appearance. While some were used as labourers or turned into gladiators or other figures of entertainment, they could also hold respectable positions in wealthy households. Rome's obsession with health and well-being, for example, saw an influx of Greek doctors entering as slaves after 47 BCE. As well as allowing Romans the benefits of better hospital treatment and the skill of surgeons, the Greeks aided advances in medicine as well. In some ways, they were perhaps a little too enthusiastic – their willingness to experiment with patients in order to test their theories caused a deep suspicion. But it was usually preferable to the expensive quacks whose methods really were quite unorthodox.

Having treatment available was a benefit of Roman life across the classes: even the slaves much lower down the chain benefited to some degree. It also showed that being brought into Rome as a slave could actually be a good career move for the skilled. Many from the East in particular were intelligent and cultured, and were able to slot easily into society and contribute greatly. In fact, some Roman citizens with overwhelming debt would sell themselves into slavery. Some slaves were also allowed to earn and keep their own money, saving up to buy their freedom or expensive clothes. By the 1st century CE, more than half of Rome's population was made up of slaves and freedmen. At this time, the Senate proposed slaves wore their own specific identifying tunics but this was rejected because of the potential embarrassment of seeing half of Rome's population dressed in such a way.

Such was the lure of Rome, that when a slave was afforded the status of a freedman, many would remain, becoming a Roman citizen and using their connections to their advantage. Some freedmen actually went on to hold important positions, such as Tiberius Claudius Narcissus, a close confidant of Emperor Claudius who almost succeeded in stopping Nero's succession to become ruler.

> According to Roman legend, Romulus and his twin brother, Remus, were the offspring of Rhea Silver and the god Mars



Housing the Romans

We can see from the architecture left behind across the former Roman Empire that the Ancient Romans took construction very seriously and saw it as a way of displaying strength, sophistication and wealth. The equestrians, or the relatively affluent, would live in large, lavish homes called *domus*, that were erected over one floor surrounding an atrium and had multiple rooms, including one or two for the slaves.

Their homes would often be decorated with marble statues and columns inside and out, and there would be beautiful paintings or mosaics. The domus also often had a large bathing pool and a garden in the middle of the building to create a sense of space and nature.

However, the poor lived in cramped apartment blocks that could be as much as nine storeys tall. Built from mud bricks or timber and with a flat roof on which to enjoy the views or sleep in hot weather, they were called insulae, and only had a couple of rooms at most in which to sleep.

Up to 40 people could live in one block and the facilities were very poor. The plebeians had to use public facilities, venturing into the courtyard to reach the lavatories, bathhouses and even cooking equipment. As such, the courtyard often featured as a handy area for socialising, and given the size of their rooms, few Romans wanted to stay indoors.

The ground floor of these buildings would contain a shop – or *taberna* – which had its own entrances on to the street and so was separated from the apartment block. The wealthy or equestrians would often own these apartments as a way of making extra money from rent.

These are the remains of the top floors of an insula in Rome; dozens upon dozens of people would have lived in these cramped apartments

The nightlife in Rome

When in Rome, what did the Romans get up to? We know they enjoyed wine, theatre and food, but what else?

A good tribute by a husband to a wife was usually Donum servait; *Lanam fecit* ('she ran the house and made wool'). Such tributes, however, would never have been paid to a group of women in Roman society who were very much looked down upon: prostitutes. Despite being legal, licensed and taxed, prostitution was considered a shameful profession, and yet there was a great demand for it.

Drawn from the slave class, the women operated from brothels dotted around Rome, satiating the Roman's fierce appetite for sex. Called *meretrix* – or "she who makes commerce of her own body" – they were banned from wearing the stola and had to wear a yellow toga as a sign of their profession. They were also denied the limited rights afforded to other women such as being able to receive an inheritance.

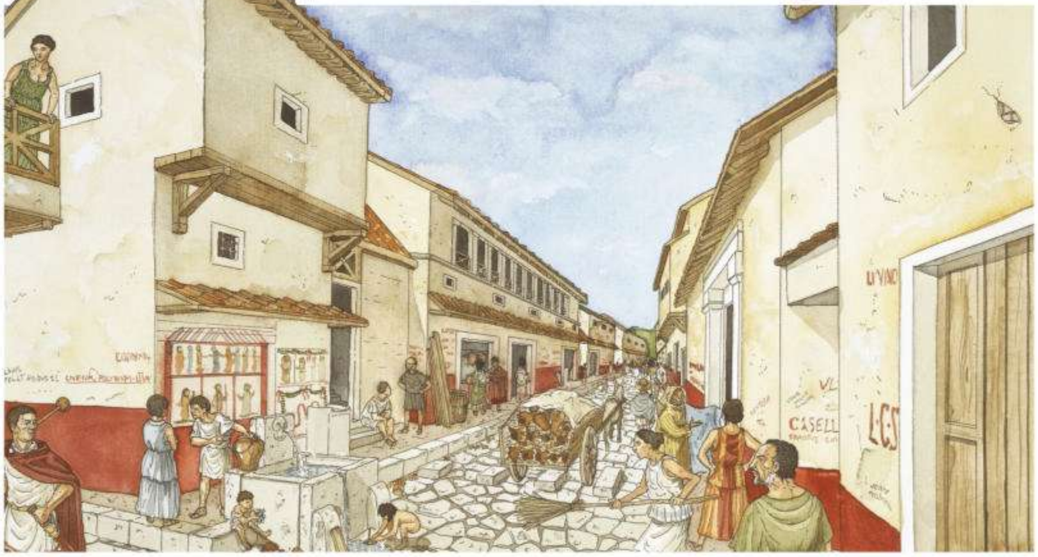
After dark, Rome became much more seedy, its streets teaming with danger as criminals made the city their very own and preyed on whoever they felt would be rich pickings. As a form of low class in their own right, they would mug and rob people down the unlit, unpoliced narrow streets. Burglary, arson, murder and fraud were typical crimes, and punishments ranged from whipping to crucifixion – but it didn't deter the desperate. Criminals could be very violent at times and often carried a sharp implement if only to slice the front of a tunic or purse in order to relieve a victim of his possessions. Some victims would take the law into their own hands as they sought to save life and property and there was a clear sense of every man for himself. The courts and lawyers that were in place were not always very effective, with matters not being helped by the fact many people would drink to excess during such periods.

The taverns – which doubled as a poor Roman's kitchen since making dinner within their own homes was too dangerous – came alive at night. During the day, they were places to eat and rest, allowing people an escape from their homes and work. Entertainment would be laid on for the slaves and plebeians who tended to enter, sitting on bar stools, drinking.

At night, taverns became more riotous. Located on a quiet side street, with the doors locked, men gambled, socialised and played games that often became heated. They also – if various artwork and the copious graffiti on the walls of ancient Rome's slums are to be believed – engaged in relations, for want of a better word, with their servers.

Taverns, however, were no place for the wealthy, who mostly stayed well away from such places and indeed decried them as being immoral and unbecoming of a Roman citizen. Not that some of those in higher society didn't venture forth. Emperor Nero was a frequent visitor to the taverns and brothels, finding them racy and exciting. Though he always made sure to wear a disguise so as not to cause a scene.

> Dyes were highly prized – anyone wearing Tyrian purple extracted from the sea snail murex would always turn heads



Food for the masses

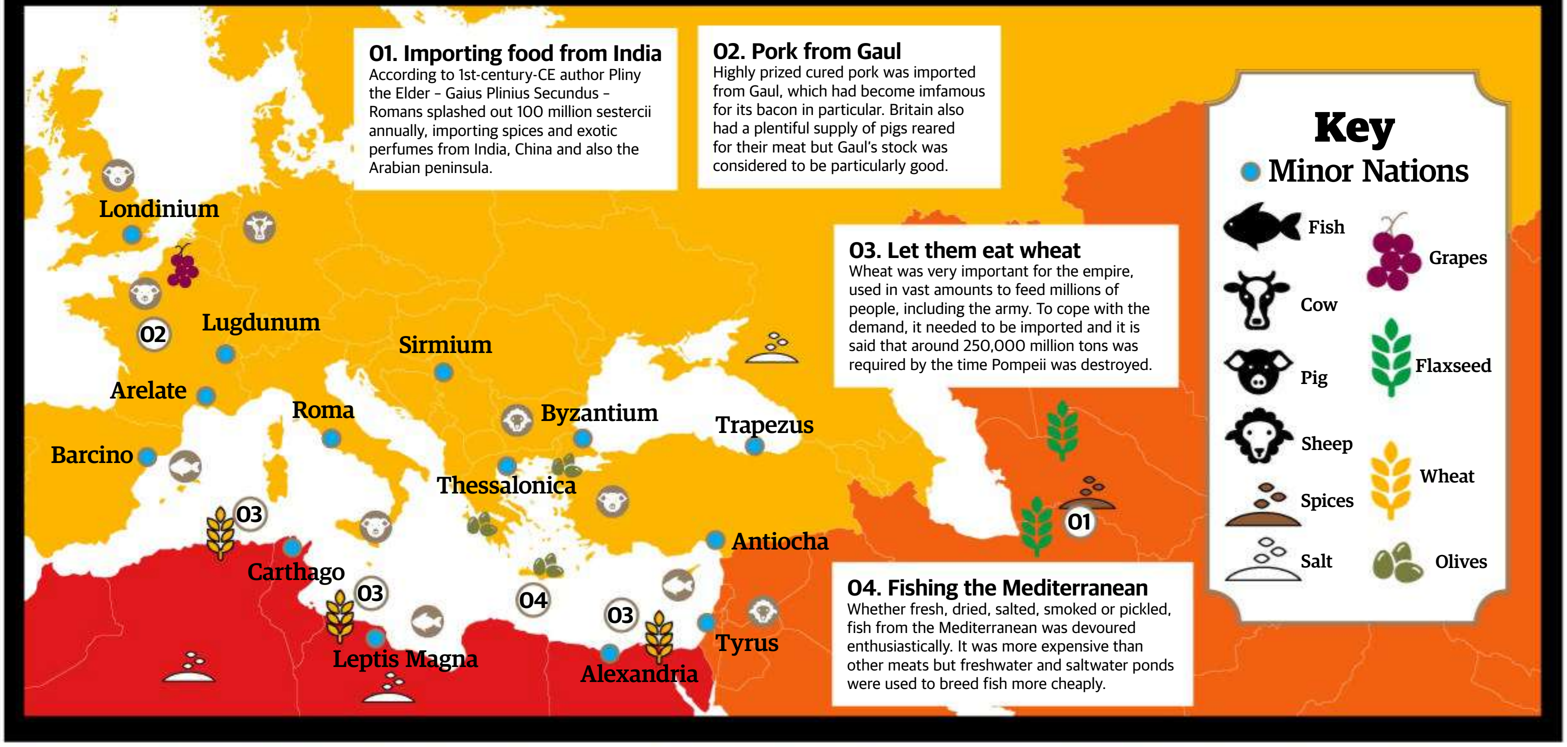
While the rich indulged their taste buds with an array of mouth-watering foods, brought to them by slaves, the diet of the poor was rather more bland. Most were unable to enjoy the sauces, expensive meats and imported spices that the aristocrats digested, so made do with cheaper alternatives.

The poor would rely on the staples of cereal, olive oil and wine and supplement it with bread, lentils, vegetables and porridge. Flat, round loaves made by cereal grain called emmer were popular, but later bread made from wheat was introduced. Women would also grind grain into flour in thrusting mills, although there is evidence of animal-driven mills attached to bakeries such as in Pompeii and Ostia.

Farmers, hunters and fishermen had better diets and thanks to no religious restrictions, anything could be consumed. Cured pork was popular, while beef was much less common.

Roman citizens would eat their meals three times a day. They would have breakfast (*jentaculum*) in the morning, lunch (*prandium*) at roughly midday and dinner (*cena*) in the evening. This would be the main meal and the highlight of many days. A lot of effort went into producing the best dinner possible with the resources that were available.

Dinner parties were a popular affair for the patricians, and infamously, they would recline on couches in order to relax as they ate and savoured each mouthful. Stuffed dormouse was a particular delicacy enjoyed by the rich, sprinkled with honey and poppy seeds. Due to the lack of cutlery, the Romans would eat with their hands, so the food had to be conveniently presented. At dinner parties it was considered impolite to eat with your left hand.

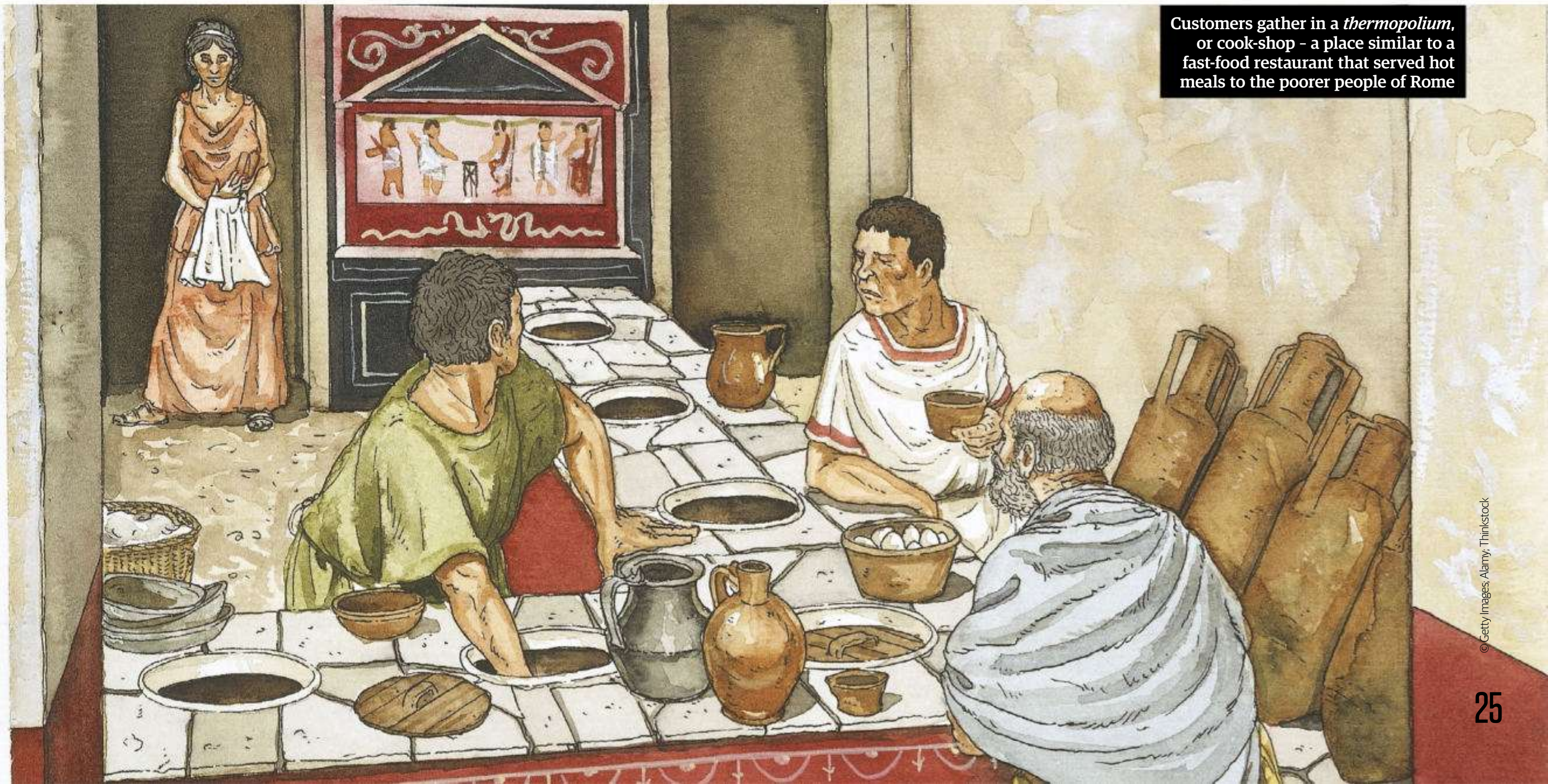


01. Importing food from India
According to 1st-century-CE author Pliny the Elder – Gaius Plinius Secundus – Romans splashed out 100 million sestercii annually, importing spices and exotic perfumes from India, China and also the Arabian peninsula.

02. Pork from Gaul
Highly prized cured pork was imported from Gaul, which had become imfamous for its bacon in particular. Britain also had a plentiful supply of pigs reared for their meat but Gaul's stock was considered to be particularly good.

03. Let them eat wheat
Wheat was very important for the empire, used in vast amounts to feed millions of people, including the army. To cope with the demand, it needed to be imported and it is said that around 250,000 million tons was required by the time Pompeii was destroyed.

04. Fishing the Mediterranean
Whether fresh, dried, salted, smoked or pickled, fish from the Mediterranean was devoured enthusiastically. It was more expensive than other meats but freshwater and saltwater ponds were used to breed fish more cheaply.

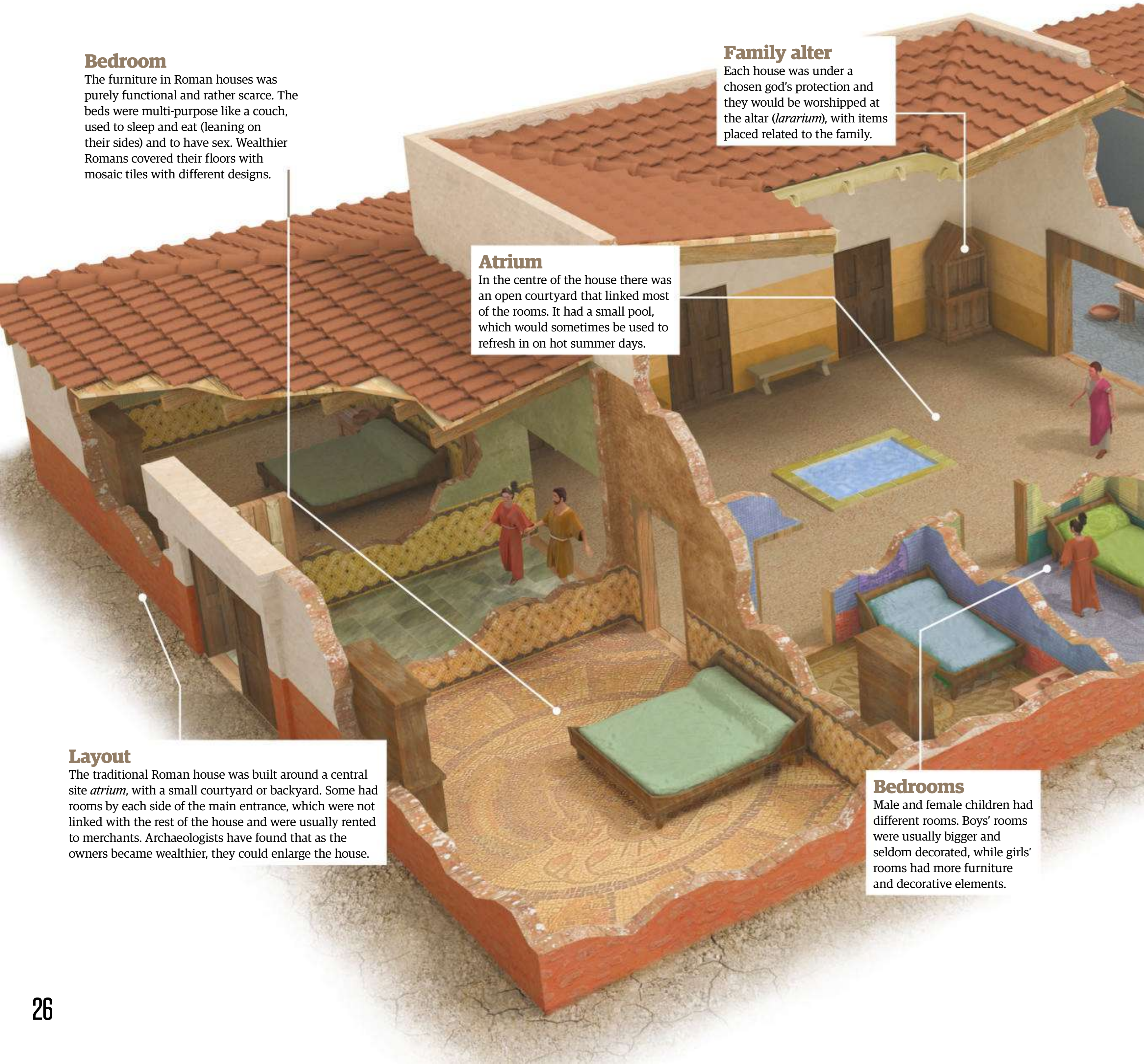


Customers gather in a *thermopolium*, or cook-shop – a place similar to a fast-food restaurant that served hot meals to the poorer people of Rome

© Getty Images; Alamy; Thinkstock

Roman Houses

The houses of Roman citizens varied according to their wealth. The more modest houses were called *insulae* - these houses, like the flats of today, emerged in the cities due to overcrowding. Patricians would live at their opulent country villas and the wealthier merchants lived in urban *domus*



Bedroom

The furniture in Roman houses was purely functional and rather scarce. The beds were multi-purpose like a couch, used to sleep and eat (leaning on their sides) and to have sex. Wealthier Romans covered their floors with mosaic tiles with different designs.

Family alter

Each house was under a chosen god's protection and they would be worshipped at the altar (*lararium*), with items placed related to the family.

Atrium

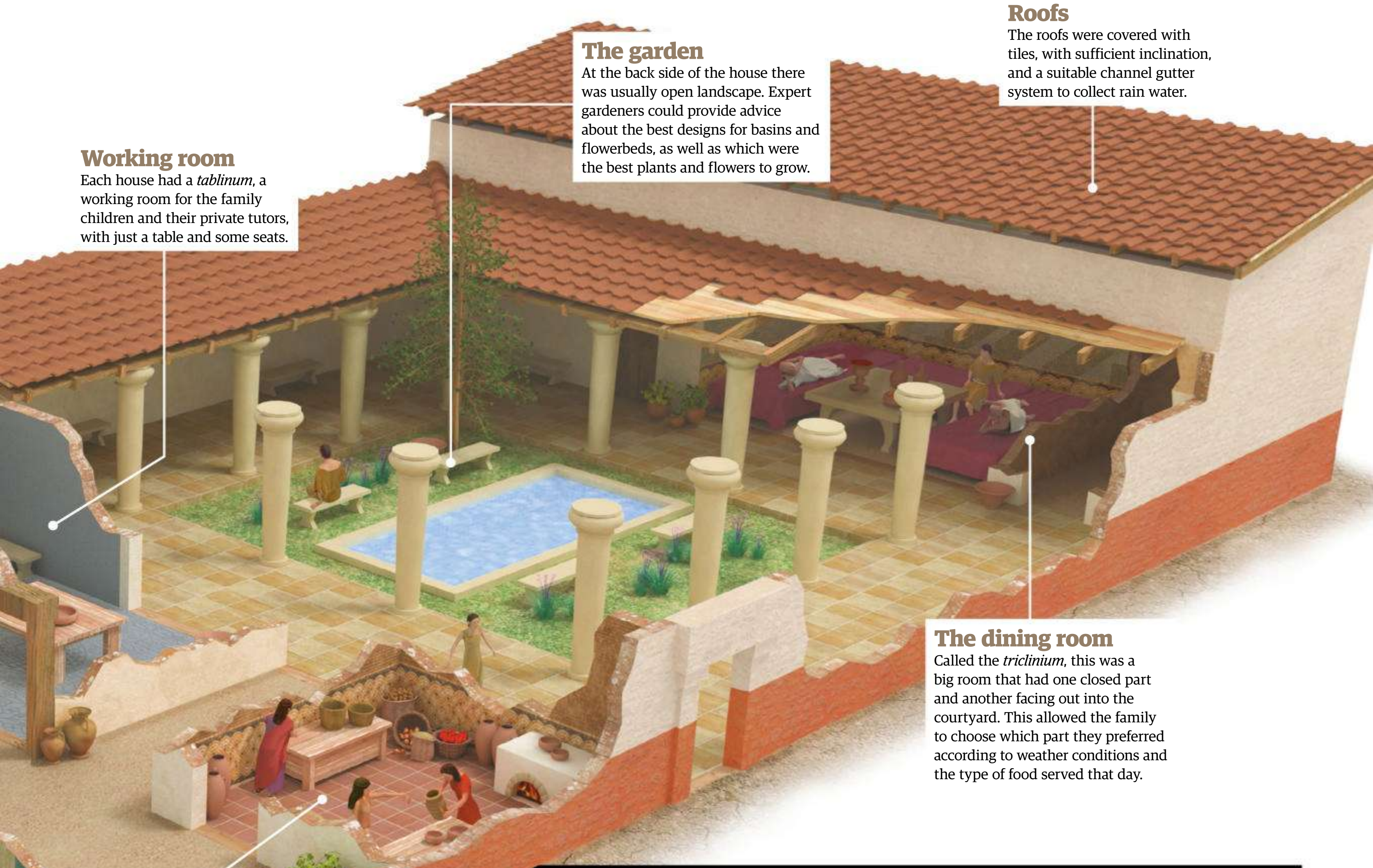
In the centre of the house there was an open courtyard that linked most of the rooms. It had a small pool, which would sometimes be used to refresh in on hot summer days.

Layout

The traditional Roman house was built around a central site *atrium*, with a small courtyard or backyard. Some had rooms by each side of the main entrance, which were not linked with the rest of the house and were usually rented to merchants. Archaeologists have found that as the owners became wealthier, they could enlarge the house.

Bedrooms

Male and female children had different rooms. Boys' rooms were usually bigger and seldom decorated, while girls' rooms had more furniture and decorative elements.



Roofs
The roofs were covered with tiles, with sufficient inclination, and a suitable channel gutter system to collect rain water.

The garden
At the back side of the house there was usually open landscape. Expert gardeners could provide advice about the best designs for basins and flowerbeds, as well as which were the best plants and flowers to grow.

Working room
Each house had a *tablinum*, a working room for the family children and their private tutors, with just a table and some seats.

The dining room
Called the *triclinium*, this was a big room that had one closed part and another facing out into the courtyard. This allowed the family to choose which part they preferred according to weather conditions and the type of food served that day.

Kitchen
This was a completely ventilated space, designed for the storage of food. There were one or two tables, jugs to keep oil and grain, and cupboards to keep the dishes and other utensils used to prepare food.

Places to eat

Generally, Roman shops (*tabernae*) were a single room with a counter. The *stabula* were sites with stables facing an open courtyard surrounded by dining rooms. The *hospitia* were guest houses with dining rooms (*triclinia*) and bedrooms. The *popinae* were sites for selling food and drinks. The workshops were called *officinae*, and taverns *taberna*.

A loaf of bread from approximately 76-79 CE, fossilised due to volcanic eruption in the city of Pompeii

© Sol 90 Images

The Roles of Roman Women

Ancient Rome wasn't an equal society and women were expected to behave and live differently to men

Ancient Rome was a male-dominated society. Women were distinctly overshadowed by men and it wasn't even a case of large numbers of females trying in vain to break a glass ceiling or struggling to make their way within a macho world. The vast majority simply weren't allowed to get that far because they didn't share the same legal status as men.

One thing at least, the head of a household didn't have the right to simply kill his wife if she questioned his authority. This was thought to have been the case for quite a long time, but 'patria potestas' – the power of a Roman father – thankfully didn't appear to stretch to that extent.

Even so, Roman women always remained 'in manu', which meant they were legally controlled by a man. As a child, this controlling role would be assumed by a woman's father; as a wife, the situation could either remain that way ('sine manu') or see control pass to her husband ('cum manu').

It created a misogynistic society in which women lived within strict boundaries. They could not play a role in public life so, unlike in Ancient Egypt, there were no direct female rulers; no equivalent to Cleopatra. Women could not become senators, judges, consuls or generals. They were unable to speak in political assemblies, they were barred from voting in elections and could not take on any role in the military. Instead, a woman was primarily expected to look after the household, including any children, while overseeing the family's slave workforce. Women also had to make clothes by spinning, weaving and sewing cloth. And while they were busy toiling, there was also pressure on them to keep up a good appearance.

To achieve this, most opted for cheap home-grown make-up, but wealthier women were able to afford imported cosmetics from Gaul, China and Germany. Perfumes were popular and were associated with a healthy body, but there was a nagging sense that women couldn't win, even in this game of expectation: the poet Juvenal wrote that "a woman buys scents and lotions with adultery in mind"!

Still, it wasn't entirely bad. Middle- and upper-class women were taught basic reading and writing skills despite some men believing literacy would lead their wives astray. Women could also own and inherit property, and they could run businesses, allowing them to independently amass great wealth in some instances. They could work as merchants and midwives, or take jobs as dancers and even doctors. There were female teachers, hairdressers and scribes. Some became wet nurses, although Roman doctors firmly believed mothers should breast-feed their own children.

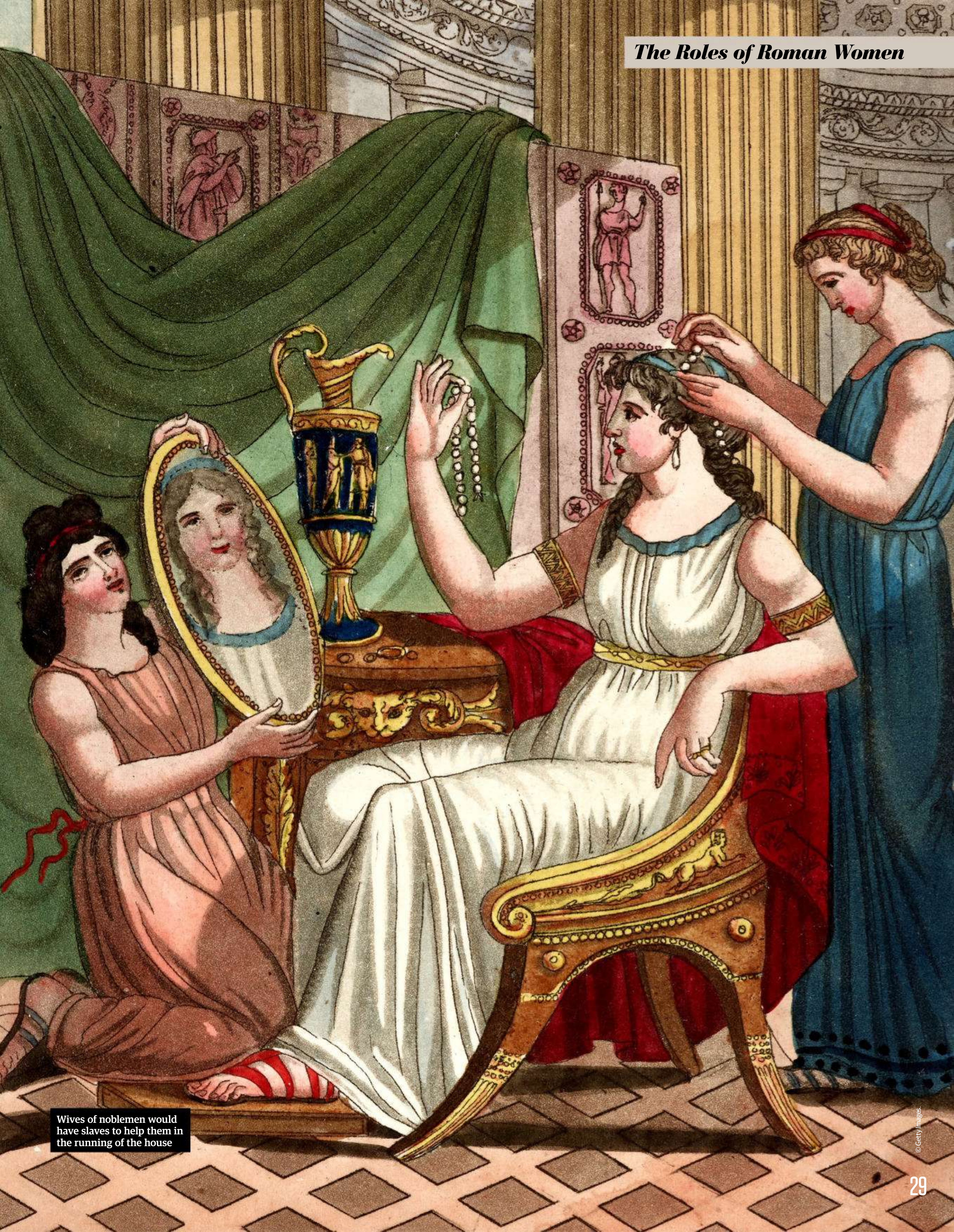
Nevertheless, marriage was important. Women were allowed to get hitched from the age of 12, which, aside from being highly illegal today, sadly meant their childhoods were largely over in the blink of an eye. At this point, a woman could switch from the feminine form of her father's name to that of her husband. This was usually indicated by adding the letter 'a' at the end.

If things weren't working out, a woman was free to request a parting of the ways. Divorce was actually common, not to mention quick and easy. It only needed either the wife or husband to say the marriage was over, and that was that. Sometimes a woman's father would bring a marriage to end, such was his ongoing power over his daughter's life. Women didn't leave empty-handed either. A wife often signed a prenuptial contract stating how much dowry she would receive if her marriage was to be dissolved.

Marriage could have distinct perks, particularly if a woman wed a powerful man. Fulvia, wife of Mark Antony, is believed to have had a significant influence on policies he enacted. In 42 BCE, when Antony and his fellow co-rulers left Rome to track down the assassins of Julius Caesar, Fulvia was effectively left in charge as Rome's de-facto co-leader. While Antony was visiting Egypt in 41 BCE and Fulvia felt his hold on power was threatened, she even raised legions to fight in support of her husband.

Religion also appeared to offer a path to great respect. The Vestal Virgins were a small group of priestesses, specially chosen between the ages of six and ten, who were responsible for maintaining the Temple of Vesta's perpetual sacred fire over 30 years of dedicated service. These women were highly honoured, protected and allowed to vote, own property and write a will. But this role wasn't without its pitfalls and men devised punishments for the Vestals if they were deemed to have failed in their duties. For example, the fifth king of Rome, Tarquin the Elder, decided a Vestal who lost her virginity should be buried alive. Other transgressions, such as letting the sacred fire go out, were met with beatings. Sadly, women's privileges were only granted on the say-so of men, although more freedoms were granted as time went on.

> "A Roman woman was primarily expected to look after the household"



Wives of noblemen would have slaves to help them in the running of the house

© Getty Images

Ancient Rome, 200 BCE – today

Roman Thermae

In Ancient Rome, personal hygiene was more of a public affair. From the obscenely wealthy right down to the poorest of the poor, everyone needed to bathe and emperors made it their mission to build public thermae, or baths, for their citizens. They popped up all over Roman land and while we will never know exactly how many there were, we do know that there were 170 in 33 BCE, just before the Roman Empire's beginning, and the number only grew.

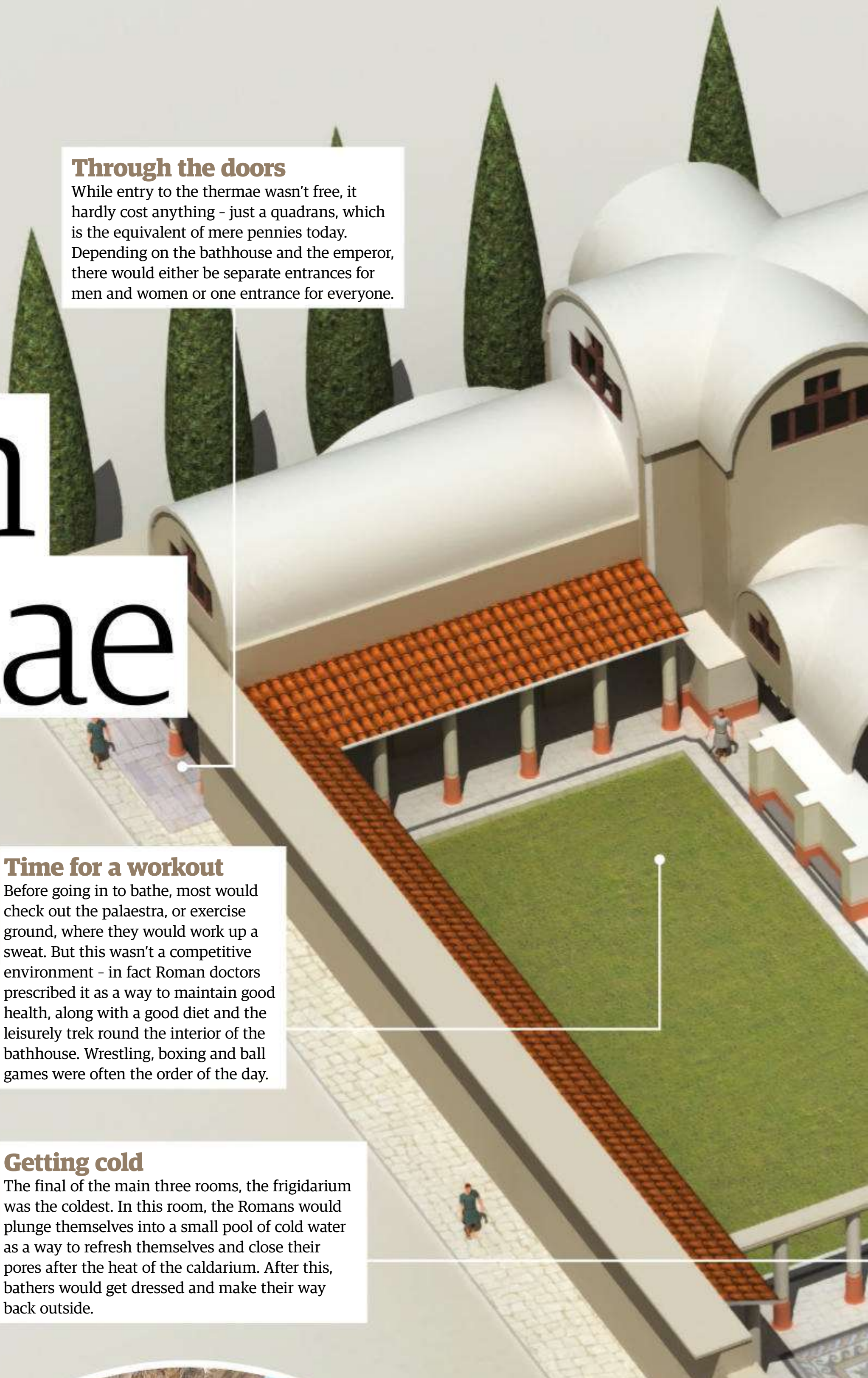
The early years of the empire saw a somewhat conservative society and so men and women bathed in separate thermae, sometimes the same building but split in two, but there is evidence that this changed over time. For instance, under Emperor Domitian there was nothing to forbid the sexes from bathing side by side.

However this changed under Hadrian who had it written in law that men and women should be separated in the thermae. In baths that had been built with only one of each room, this meant that men and women effectively had time slots or set days that they could attend.

This then begs the question of the opening hours. We do know that the buildings closed at sunset – all ancient writers seem unanimous in their agreement of this – but opening times are a little more hazy.

Juvenal states that they opened at the fifth hour, while other suggest that eighth or the ninth. Whatever the time, it was signified by the ringing of a little bell, or tintinnabulum.

Everyone's progression through the thermae was the same. From the palaestra, or exercise ground, they would change and then make their way through the rooms of the bathhouse from cold to hot. No matter where you were in the Roman Empire, you followed the same ritual – emperors may come and go, but the thermae would remain the same through the centuries.

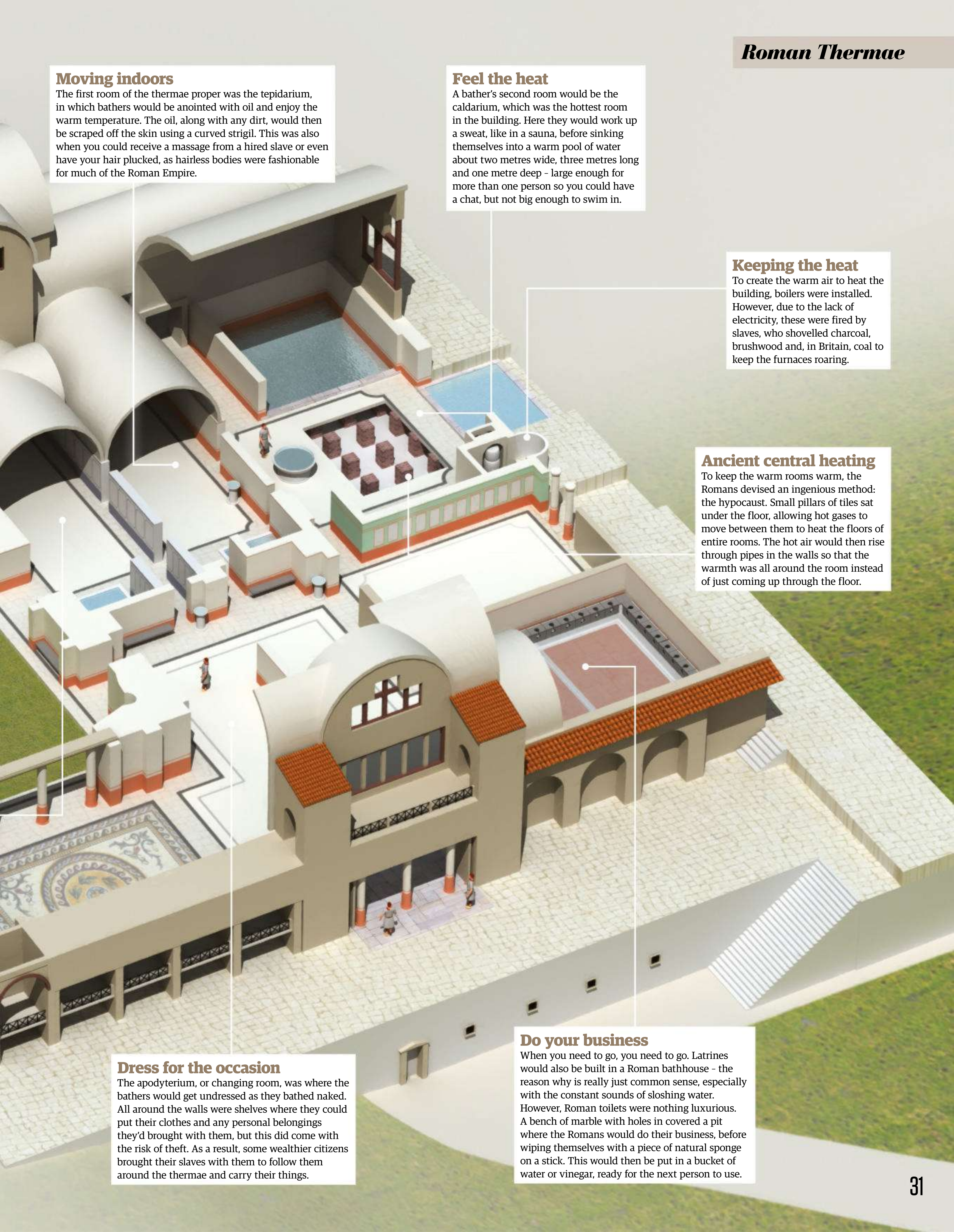


Through the doors
While entry to the thermae wasn't free, it hardly cost anything – just a quadrans, which is the equivalent of mere pennies today. Depending on the bathhouse and the emperor, there would either be separate entrances for men and women or one entrance for everyone.

Time for a workout
Before going in to bathe, most would check out the palaestra, or exercise ground, where they would work up a sweat. But this wasn't a competitive environment – in fact Roman doctors prescribed it as a way to maintain good health, along with a good diet and the leisurely trek round the interior of the bathhouse. Wrestling, boxing and ball games were often the order of the day.

Getting cold
The final of the main three rooms, the frigidarium was the coldest. In this room, the Romans would plunge themselves into a small pool of cold water as a way to refresh themselves and close their pores after the heat of the caldarium. After this, bathers would get dressed and make their way back outside.

Underground passageways allowed slaves to move throughout the thermae without being seen



Moving indoors

The first room of the thermae proper was the tepidarium, in which bathers would be anointed with oil and enjoy the warm temperature. The oil, along with any dirt, would then be scraped off the skin using a curved strigil. This was also when you could receive a massage from a hired slave or even have your hair plucked, as hairless bodies were fashionable for much of the Roman Empire.

Feel the heat

A bather's second room would be the caldarium, which was the hottest room in the building. Here they would work up a sweat, like in a sauna, before sinking themselves into a warm pool of water about two metres wide, three metres long and one metre deep – large enough for more than one person so you could have a chat, but not big enough to swim in.

Keeping the heat

To create the warm air to heat the building, boilers were installed. However, due to the lack of electricity, these were fired by slaves, who shovelled charcoal, brushwood and, in Britain, coal to keep the furnaces roaring.

Ancient central heating

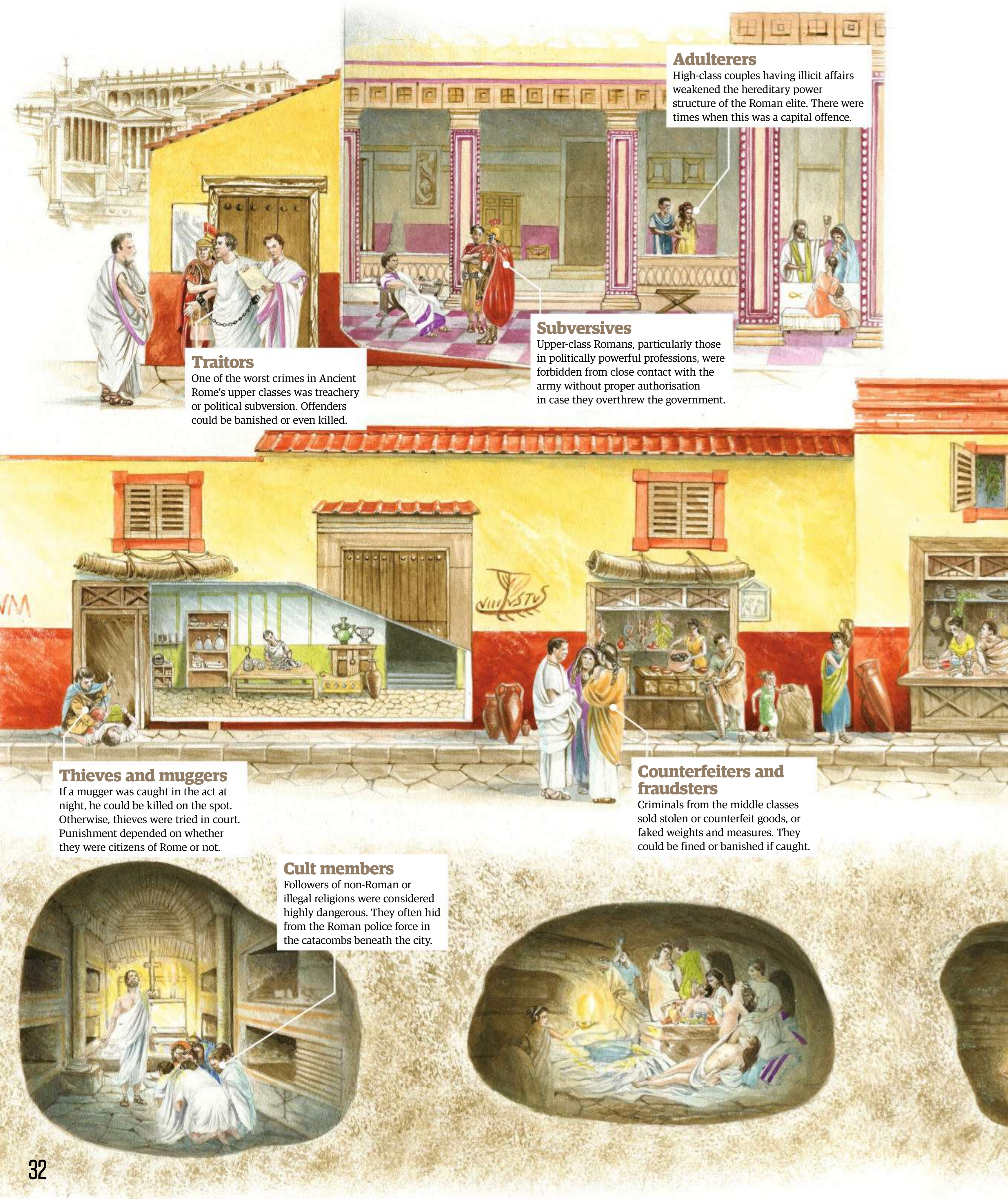
To keep the warm rooms warm, the Romans devised an ingenious method: the hypocaust. Small pillars of tiles sat under the floor, allowing hot gases to move between them to heat the floors of entire rooms. The hot air would then rise through pipes in the walls so that the warmth was all around the room instead of just coming up through the floor.

Dress for the occasion

The apodyterium, or changing room, was where the bathers would get undressed as they bathed naked. All around the walls were shelves where they could put their clothes and any personal belongings they'd brought with them, but this did come with the risk of theft. As a result, some wealthier citizens brought their slaves with them to follow them around the thermae and carry their things.

Do your business

When you need to go, you need to go. Latrines would also be built in a Roman bathhouse – the reason why is really just common sense, especially with the constant sounds of sloshing water. However, Roman toilets were nothing luxurious. A bench of marble with holes in covered a pit where the Romans would do their business, before wiping themselves with a piece of natural sponge on a stick. This would then be put in a bucket of water or vinegar, ready for the next person to use.



Adulterers

High-class couples having illicit affairs weakened the hereditary power structure of the Roman elite. There were times when this was a capital offence.

Traitors

One of the worst crimes in Ancient Rome's upper classes was treachery or political subversion. Offenders could be banished or even killed.

Subversives

Upper-class Romans, particularly those in politically powerful professions, were forbidden from close contact with the army without proper authorisation in case they overthrew the government.

Thieves and muggers

If a mugger was caught in the act at night, he could be killed on the spot. Otherwise, thieves were tried in court. Punishment depended on whether they were citizens of Rome or not.

Counterfeiters and fraudsters

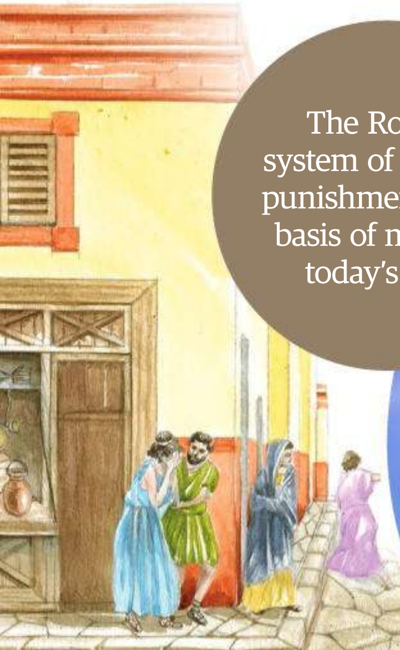
Criminals from the middle classes sold stolen or counterfeit goods, or faked weights and measures. They could be fined or banished if caught.

Cult members

Followers of non-Roman or illegal religions were considered highly dangerous. They often hid from the Roman police force in the catacombs beneath the city.

Underworld of Ancient Rome

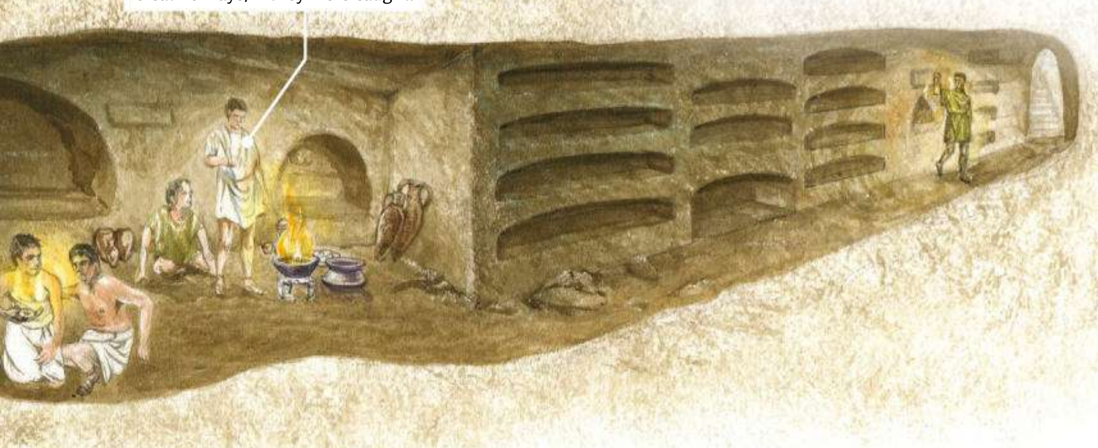
In the Senate and the streets, crime was rife in Ancient Rome. From escaped slaves to treacherous aristocrats, discover the extent of Roman villainy



The Roman system of law and punishment is the basis of many of today's laws

Many statues of a personified justice we see today are derived from the Roman goddess Justitia

Escaped slaves and gladiators
Runaways from Rome's slave system could be executed on the spot, or later, in more painful and creative ways, if they were caught.



Ancient Rome had a problem with crime. Robberies were common, and so were violence and rioting. Merchants cheated their customers; desperate slaves escaped regularly and joined other outlaws in their hiding places beneath the city. At the top level of society, the wealthy and aristocratic were often embroiled in secret or subversive plots. From the top to the bottom, the city was riddled with criminal activity.

Beneath the streets of Ancient Rome lurked some of the city's most dangerous criminals. The catacombs that form a warren of tunnels and caves under the city were home to escaped slaves and outlawed religions that used the underground labyrinth as a hiding place.

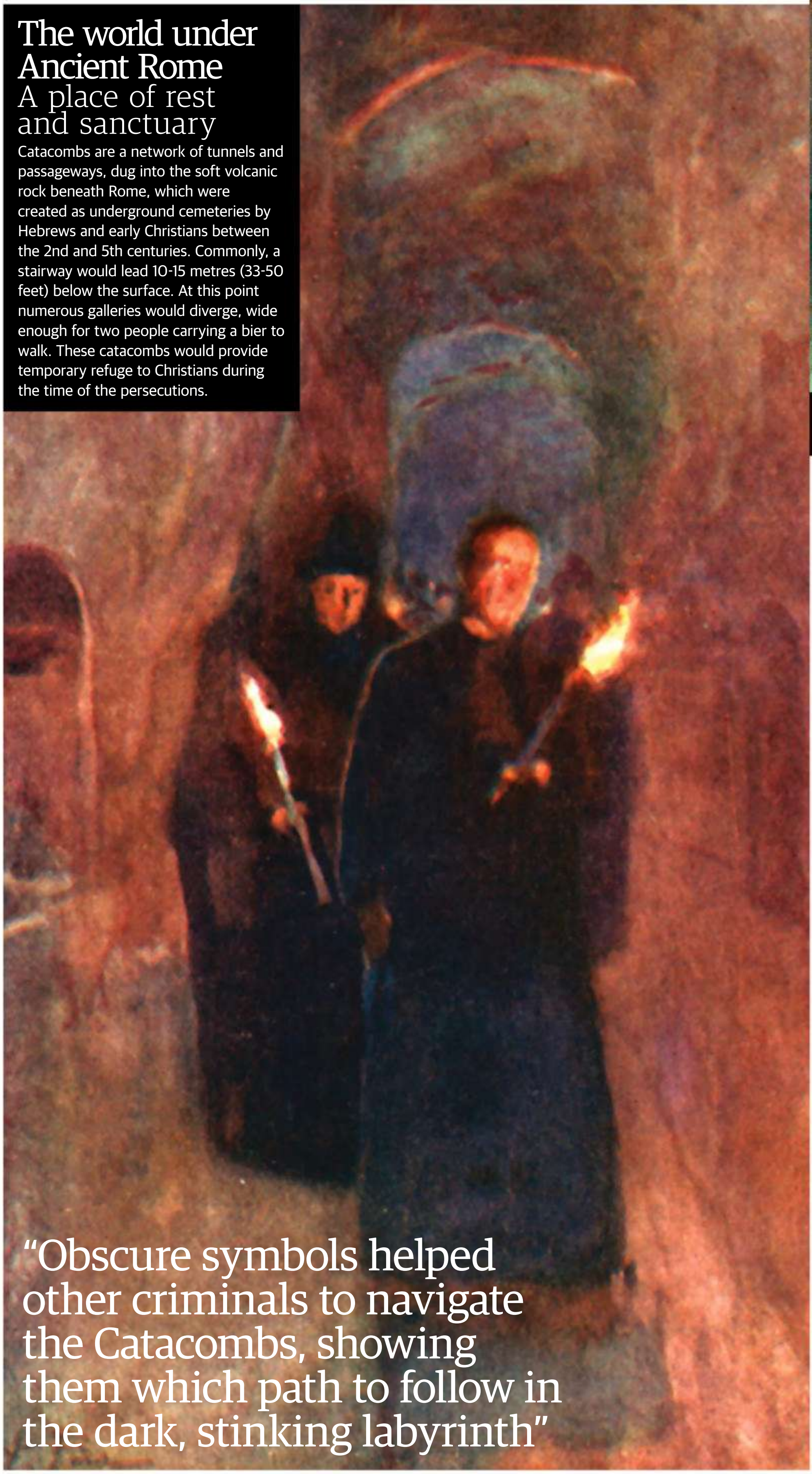
Dark, often damp, riddled with vermin, claustrophobically small in places and stacked with the corpses of previous inhabitants, the catacombs were not a place where people would want to stay. Escaped slaves would want to move on from there as soon as they could, and not just because of the grim conditions. In 71 BCE, Rome crucified an escaped gladiator called Spartacus who was widely believed to be the ringleader of a group of escapees. He and his group had caused the Third Servile War, which raged for two years and resulted in Rome passing even harsher sentences against escaped slaves. Not wanting to be caught, slaves used the catacombs only as a temporary hiding place on their way out of the city.

It was the religious cults that tended to stay in the underworld of the catacombs. Romans were usually quite open-minded about gods who weren't their own, but some religions – Judaism, Christianity and Bacchanalia – followed dangerous ideologies that didn't coincide with Roman values. Bacchanalia was a Greek religion that the Romans had adopted. Its followers celebrated their god Bacchus with wild, drunken orgies, and it was rumoured that they would murder those who refused to participate. In 186 BCE, a law was passed against Bacchanalia.

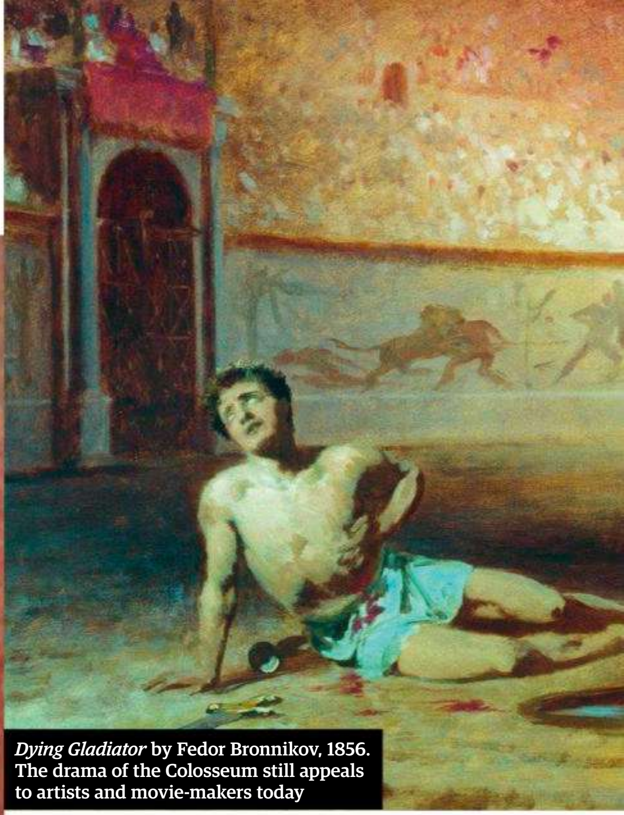
The world under Ancient Rome

A place of rest and sanctuary

Catacombs are a network of tunnels and passageways, dug into the soft volcanic rock beneath Rome, which were created as underground cemeteries by Hebrews and early Christians between the 2nd and 5th centuries. Commonly, a stairway would lead 10-15 metres (33-50 feet) below the surface. At this point numerous galleries would diverge, wide enough for two people carrying a bier to walk. These catacombs would provide temporary refuge to Christians during the time of the persecutions.



> "Obscure symbols helped other criminals to navigate the Catacombs, showing them which path to follow in the dark, stinking labyrinth"



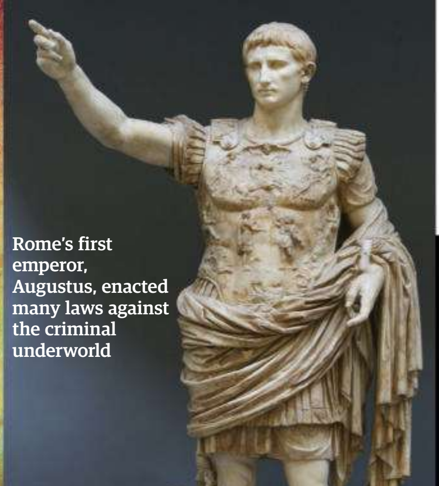
Dying Gladiator by Fedor Bronnikov, 1856. The drama of the Colosseum still appeals to artists and movie-makers today

Jews and Christians, meanwhile, were criminalised in Ancient Rome because they believed that there was only one god. During the Roman Republic, with its pantheon of gods, this was frowned upon, but by the time Rome became an empire it was an active threat to national security. Rome's last dictator, Julius Caesar, was deified when he died, his heir Augustus inheriting the title *Divi Filius* or "son of a god". Judaism and Christianity threatened this idea of divine emperor, and their followers fled underground.

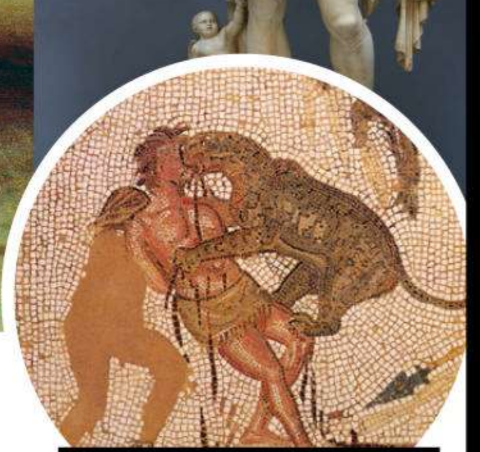
There remains evidence in the catacombs of the life that these people lived. Often they would carve or paint their religious symbols onto the walls. Jews often painted images of themselves performing their rites, or of the menorah - the seven-branched candlestick that is often used to represent their faith. Christians were different, though. Knowing that they were the most-hated religious criminals and that Rome's riot police would sometimes pursue them even as far as the catacombs, they used a range of cryptic signs such as stylised fish, Chi Ro symbols and "sator squares" - coded word games that secretly spelled out a prayer - rather than the obvious cross or crucifix. These obscure symbols helped other criminals navigate the catacombs, showing them which path to follow in the dark, vile labyrinth. The only reason they stayed near the city was that they believed they should spread their faith to be rewarded for their sufferings in the afterlife.

Crime wasn't limited to the literal underworld, though. Roman street crime would be familiar to anyone who watches today's news. Popular articles about graffiti, theft, disorder and violent crime were as common in Ancient Rome as news reports about antisocial behaviour in deprived inner-city areas today. Roman sources like the poet Juvenal describe everything from nuisance noise, rowdy crowds and littering to mugging and burglary.

Walking down an ordinary street in Rome meant walking among a gamut of muggers and thieves. The public roads were noisy and crowded, making



Rome's first emperor, Augustus, enacted many laws against the criminal underworld



A Roman criminal is punished by being thrown to the lions in the gladiatorial arena. This mosaic is from Roman Tunisia and dates from the 3rd century

One law for one...

Crime and punishment in Rome's class system

The free Roman citizen

A free citizen of Rome, if caught stealing or cheating, was sued in court and made to pay a fine of twice to four times the value of what he had taken. If he'd committed a particularly serious crime, such as adultery, bribery or counterfeiting money or documents, he could be banished from society for the rest of his life. He would only be sentenced to death for very serious kinds of murder or treason, and could be offered a private execution instead of a public one. His legal protector in court had to be someone else of the same rank.

A statue depicting a free Roman citizen in a toga

The non-citizen underclass

A member of the Roman underclasses – a poor, non-citizen plebeian – could expect stricter penalties and punishments than a free citizen. If caught in the act of mugging someone at night, he could face execution, sometimes on the spot. However if he was arrested after the crime, or for anything apart from night-robbery or murder, he could argue his case in court. His legal protector in court could be "anyone who cared".

Non-citizens were given stricter punishment if found guilty

pick-pocketing easy – a thief could grab or cut a purse from their victim's belt and be off into the crowd before they had even been noticed. Several servants or guards, in the hope of deterring would-be muggers, would often accompany higher-class Romans into the lower-class areas. This caused its own problems for ordinary city dwellers, who would frequently complain about being barged out of the way and knocked over. The streets were littered with rotting produce and human sewage, which ordinary householders would dispose of from their upstairs windows. Being knocked sprawling into the street was also an open invitation for thieves to attack, under the guise of helping the victim to their feet.

The city's poorer inhabitants – members of the plebeian underclass – made up the criminals of the lower-class streets. They were typically poor and underfed – vinegar and beans was their dinner – so their motivation for criminality wasn't greed, but need. Ordinary working Romans had been complaining of poverty and dejection and contrasting their bitter lot with the better lives of the higher classes from the very beginning of the empire. With such a level of poverty and social disaffection, it's no wonder many of the lower classes turned to crime just to survive. Even a few coins stolen from one of their peers would buy some better food, or some cheap wine to help them momentarily forget their poverty.

Drinking led to another set of problems however: drunken violence. Juvenal, discussing his own mugging in his third *Satire*, seems just as offended to be accosted by a drunken lout as he is about being robbed. Public drunkenness was often the root cause of the mobs and rioting that periodically plagued Ancient Rome – setting fires, looting goods and produce and damaging property. For this reason, Augustus set up two police forces in the later years of his reign. The *vigiles urbani* were the City Watch – a security service that doubled as the city's fire service – while the *cohortes urbanae* functioned as the riot police.

> One of the worst crimes to commit in Ancient Rome was patricide, or killing your own father

Every so often, they would be ordered to clear the lower-class criminals out of a particular area in the city or the countryside and villages immediately around it. Low-level criminality was so ensconced in plebeian Roman society that often the only effect this had was to move the problem from area to area, mostly in the poor districts. But the middle classes had their own criminal element – they committed more considered and more lucrative crimes.

Cheating, swindling and counterfeiting went on in Rome's streets and markets on a daily basis. Ancient Rome had its own versions of our cheap designer fakes, payday loan scams and food scares. Counterfeit coins and jewellery were a problem in the city. Some merchants would bulk out their grain with gravel or top up wine with seawater. Others leant money out at illegally high rates and took their debtors for everything they owned. Depending on their social standing, these merchants and moneylenders could be sentenced to a range of punishments, from a public lashing to the payment of compensation.

> "Rome had its own versions of cheap designer fakes, payday loan scams and food scares"

The merchants were better educated and more organised than the lower-class street criminals. Rather than acting on impulse, they carefully planned both their crimes and how they would deal with getting caught. It was common for middle-class Roman traders to organise themselves into groups like trade unions, known as *collegia*. While many of these were composed of law-abiding citizens, the odd criminal collegium did exist. The collegia's collective funds and organised legal status meant that they had power and resources that could be employed to get their members out of trouble if necessary. Criminal collegia were the nearest thing that Ancient Rome had to the Mafia and they operated on much the same principle – keep together, stay quiet, and make money. Thanks to the organisation of these guilds, even if a criminal collegium member was caught, he could expect to be able to employ a decent lawyer and get away with a fine, or possibly banishment. If the worst happened and the fine he had to pay reduced him to complete bankruptcy, though, he could be forced into slavery to pay off his debt.

Crime didn't stop when it reached the upper echelons of the city, either – in fact, the high-class

Lawyering up in Ancient Rome

Defence in the Roman courts

Roman offenders took their legal representation seriously. Rome is sometimes said to have had the first ever lawyers and they were available to free citizens and to any non-citizen of the underclass who hadn't committed a capital crime.

During a court case, in front of the local praetor (judge), a lawyer could represent his client and argue on his behalf. A lawyer's main function was to either prove his client not guilty or to reduce the penalty or punishment for his client's crime. However, all Roman lawyers were not created equal. Some served the wealthy patrician families and were rich and high-class themselves – "It's the stylish clothes that sell the lawyer," wrote Juvenal.

Average citizens and non-citizens had no access to the high-powered lawyers of the elite, although members of a collegium could pool resources and influence to employ a more expensive lawyer for one of their members. Lawyers for poorer clients, however, sometimes ended up being paid with farm goods or food. The underclass were able to mount a trained legal defence in court – but their lawyers were generally almost as poor as the people they were defending.

> "Adultery also became a crime among the ruling elite, because it threatened the family system of inheritance"

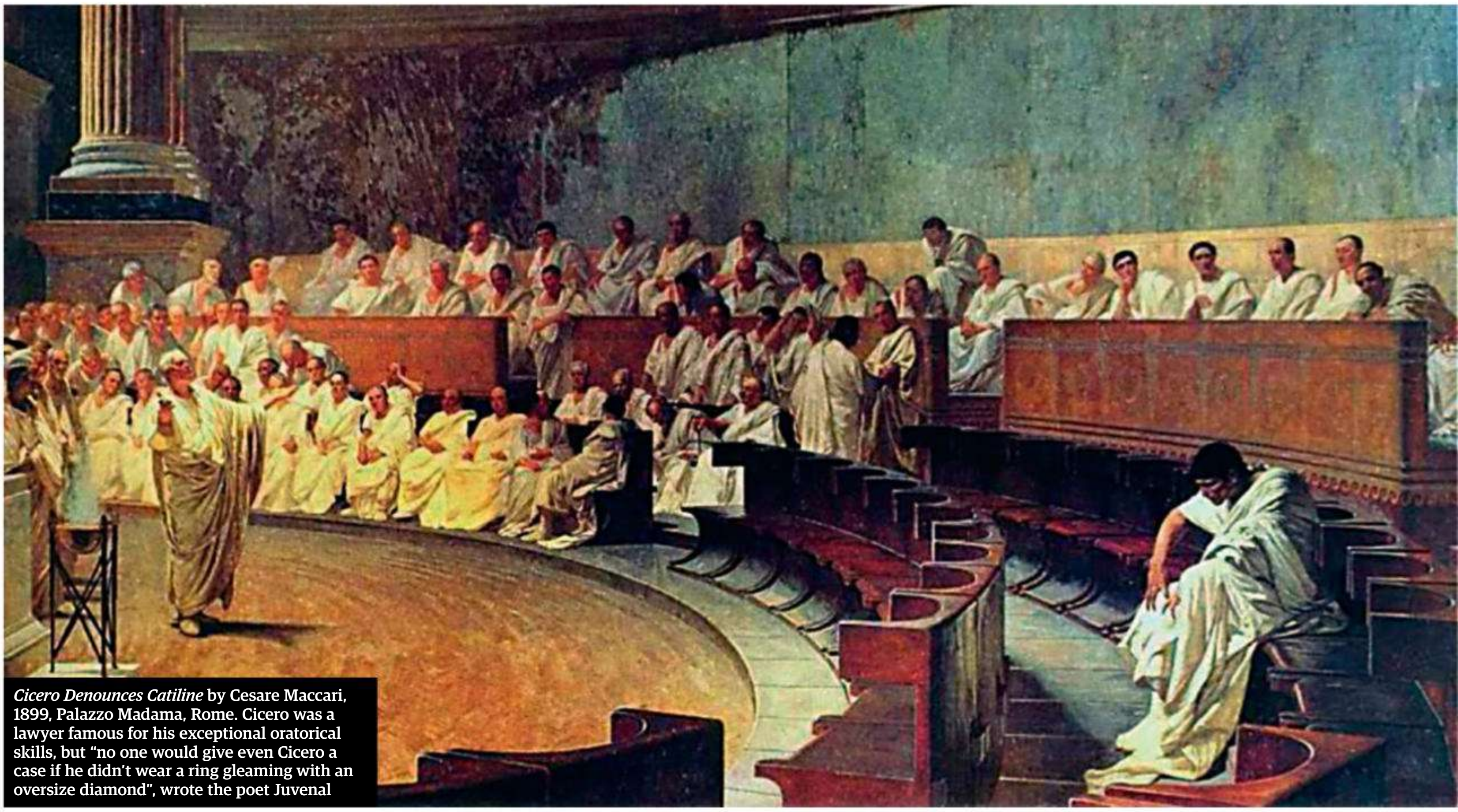
villas of the elite were a hotbed of a different type of criminal activity. Romans of the patrician class had no need to steal or swindle. They were born into the world of inherited wealth that the lower class longed for and the middle classes aspired to. Their lives were very different from the general population, and so were their crimes. This was especially true during the transition from the republic to empire, when treason became one of the worst offences any Roman could commit. The crimes that are most familiar to us today among the Roman upper classes are of course the plots and assassinations that characterised much of the later empire.

We often think of the Roman upper classes as a hotbed of sedition and plotting, and many did commit treachery in one way or another. Treachery, however, wasn't simply limited to plotting or assassination; it was anything that threatened Rome as a whole – the idea of the "Eternal City" was perhaps more important than the people who lived in it. Upper-class Romans were just as much at risk of being beguiled by the treacherous new religion of Christianity as the plebeians.

Among the male elite there was always the danger that some bright young general or politician might think he could do a better job of ruling the city and its attendant empire than the current establishment. Some of the worst upper-class Roman crimes included paying bribes to the army and patricide.

Patricide meant killing your father or the *paterfamilias* of your family. While this was a shocking crime in all strata of Roman society, it was worst in the patrician class. The head of the household symbolised a kind of mini-emperor, a symbol of rulership, inheritance and the established order. To violate that was to violate the principles of the Roman Empire. Adultery also became a crime among the ruling elite, because it threatened the family system of inheritance.

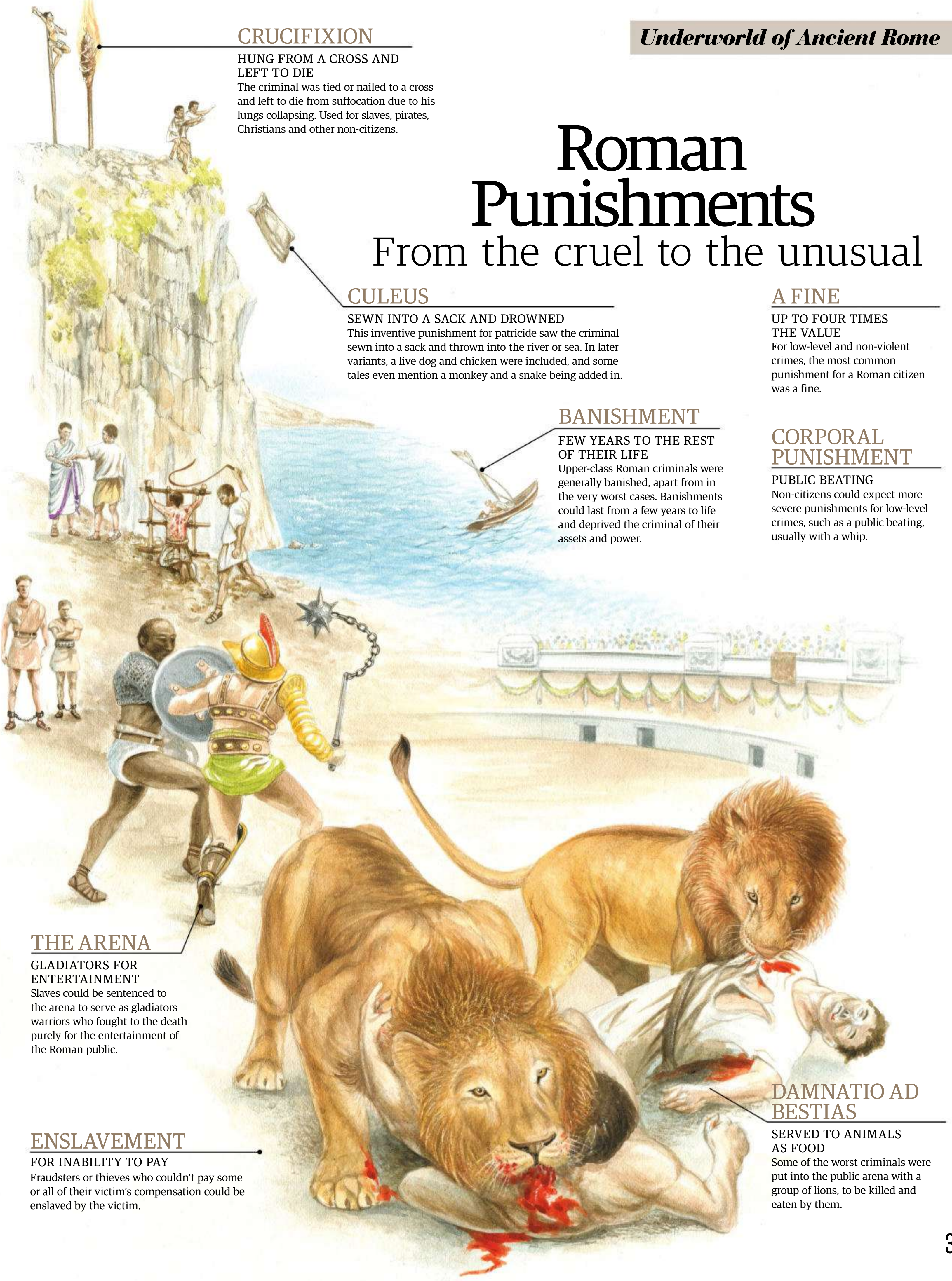
Crime was a significant problem for the population of Ancient Rome from all walks of life. And while the crimes – and their punishments – all varied in severity, execution and motivation, when it came down to it they all revolved around the same needs and wants: more money, more control, more power.



Cicero Denounces Catiline by Cesare Maccari, 1899, Palazzo Madama, Rome. Cicero was a lawyer famous for his exceptional oratorical skills, but "no one would give even Cicero a case if he didn't wear a ring gleaming with an oversize diamond", wrote the poet Juvenal

Roman Punishments

From the cruel to the unusual



CRUCIFIXION

HUNG FROM A CROSS AND LEFT TO DIE

The criminal was tied or nailed to a cross and left to die from suffocation due to his lungs collapsing. Used for slaves, pirates, Christians and other non-citizens.

CULEUS

SEWN INTO A SACK AND DROWNED

This inventive punishment for patricide saw the criminal sewn into a sack and thrown into the river or sea. In later variants, a live dog and chicken were included, and some tales even mention a monkey and a snake being added in.

A FINE

UP TO FOUR TIMES THE VALUE

For low-level and non-violent crimes, the most common punishment for a Roman citizen was a fine.

BANISHMENT

FEW YEARS TO THE REST OF THEIR LIFE

Upper-class Roman criminals were generally banished, apart from in the very worst cases. Banishments could last from a few years to life and deprived the criminal of their assets and power.

CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

PUBLIC BEATING

Non-citizens could expect more severe punishments for low-level crimes, such as a public beating, usually with a whip.

THE ARENA

GLADIATORS FOR ENTERTAINMENT

Slaves could be sentenced to the arena to serve as gladiators - warriors who fought to the death purely for the entertainment of the Roman public.

ENSLAVEMENT

FOR INABILITY TO PAY

Fraudsters or thieves who couldn't pay some or all of their victim's compensation could be enslaved by the victim.

DAMNATIO AD BESTIAS

SERVED TO ANIMALS AS FOOD

Some of the worst criminals were put into the public arena with a group of lions, to be killed and eaten by them.

© Sandra Doyle/The Art Agency; Look and Learn; The Ashmolean Museum

Blood, Guts & Gladiators

From enjoying beautiful poetry to cheering on a bloodthirsty gladiator going in for the kill, the Romans sure knew how to enjoy their free time

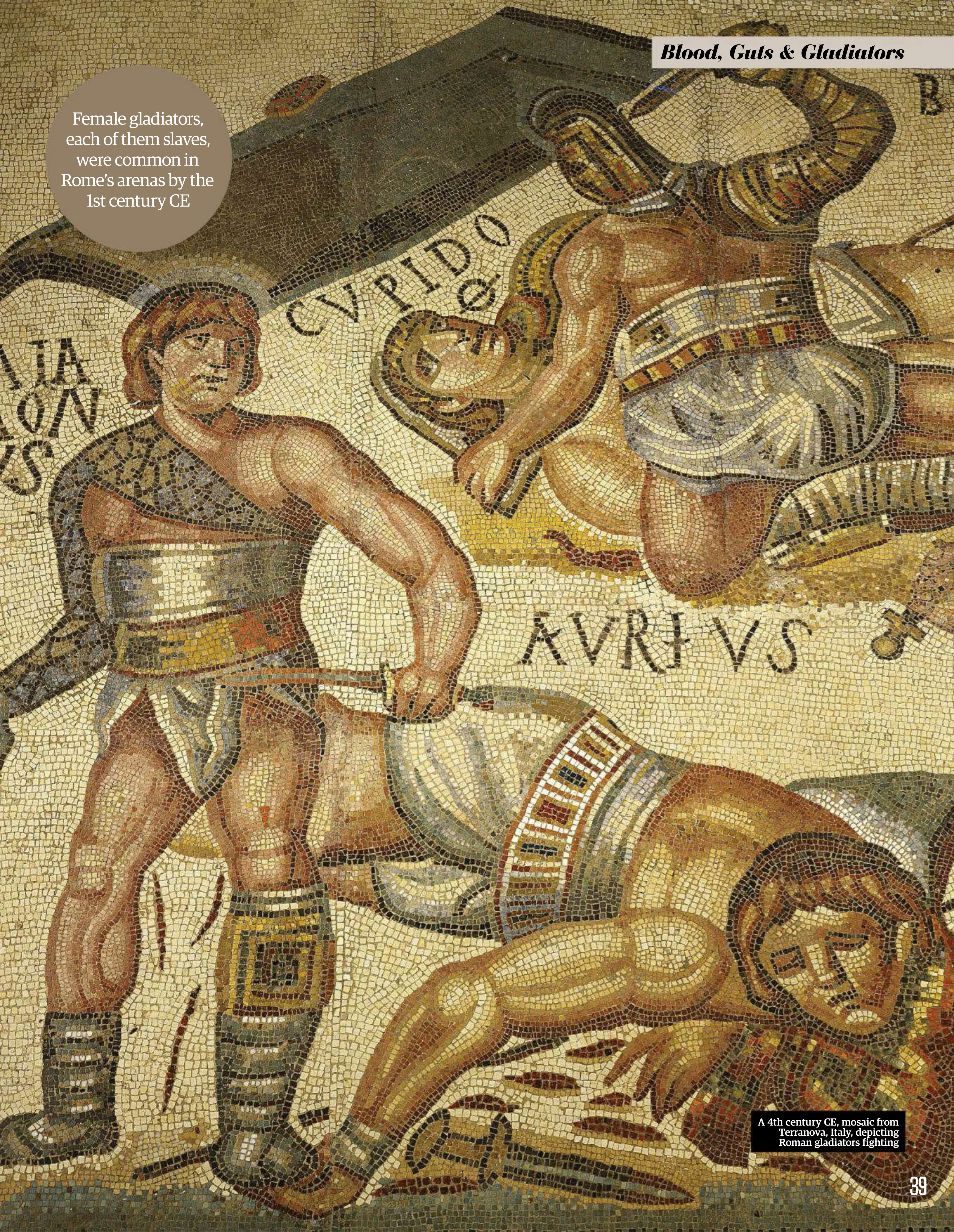
Entertainment and sport were central to Roman living with lots of pursuits, both literate and spectacular, keeping Rome's citizens busy during their free time. They were used by the emperor to control and occupy the poor, idle masses in a bid to head off any potential revolt, but the vast population would come to enjoy and embrace great and clear prose, elegant Latin poetry, and art inspired by their neighbours, the Etruscans.

The ordinary Romans were literate, or at least semi-literate, visiting libraries and enjoying the work of satirists such as Juvenal, who proved so influential that, in 1738, poet Samuel Johnson would model his work, *London*, on Juvenal's *Satire III*. But to concentrate on the arts is to tell half a story: the Romans came to love large visual, mainly brutal events so much more. The rulers knew that and used huge games to paper over the cracks of the empire's struggles.

Their greatest innovation was truly turning sport from something that was played into something that would be watched for pleasure, celebrating the athleticism of man and gleaning great reflected glory from the achievements of the strong competitors to a greater degree than the Greeks. Huge amphitheatres and stadia dominated Roman towns and cities, and they became proud and powerful focal points. Spectator sports also became hugely organised with large teams looking to get the best out of those competing.

Individuals and groups of friends could find their own pursuits, though, away from the huge venues. They wanted to be fed, and entertained, and so it became known as panem et circenses – bread and circuses. Board games were very popular among citizens with the two-player strategy board game *ludus latrunculorum* drawing on military tactics and being played across the empire. Tic-Tac-Toe was another that kept minds ticking over in Ancient Rome, and it's still played today, sometimes under the name noughts and crosses.

The countryside would be home to hunters and recreational fishing. There was also boxing, wrestling, swimming, throwing and riding, as well as a version of football, known as harpastum, played on a pitch. It was depicted in drawings as having two sides, with the aim appearing to be to keep the ball in their own half, the game was seen as a way to keep soldiers fit and healthy.



Female gladiators, each of them slaves, were common in Rome's arenas by the 1st century CE

A 4th century CE, mosaic from Terranova, Italy, depicting Roman gladiators fighting

Land of gore and glory

Wild beasts wouldn't tear people away from the Romans' spectacles. Indeed, they'd have citizens flocking to stadia in their droves

Ancient Romans loved their bloody sports and for more than 650 years, they turned up in their tens of thousands to enjoy the ferocious spectacles of gladiatorial combats and chariot racing, admiring the courage of the participants while thriving on the inherent danger. Far from being seen as barbaric or cruel, whether to man or beast, such forms of entertainment were embraced and celebrated, seen as defining the Roman civilisation. Since the empire's citizens prized physical fitness, those who took part were often seen as symbols of strength, especially for the wealthy sponsors of the well-publicised shows.

Miliarius was the name given to a charioteer or horse who won more than 1,000 races

Sports tended to be all-male affairs both in terms of those competing and those who gathered to watch. Huge stadia and arena were built in Rome, from the splendour of the Colosseum, completed in 80 BCE for crowds of up to 80,000 to the vast, long and narrow Circus Maximus on Palatine Hill, which would be packed with as many as 250,000 people for the most popular events. Since sport was enjoyed across the empire, more than 230 steeply seated ancient amphitheatres have been discovered across all territories, all of which would have been a source of civic pride, many clad with marble and decorated with statues. Britain's largest was in Chester.

Crowds would gain free entry to events, which was a way for emperors to make themselves popular. Romans would seize the opportunity of watching sports, tending to make an entire day of it. The huge popularity of such occasions meant that even the largest venues tended to become overcrowded, leading to fights among those trying to get in. But unlike today, the people they watched and those who were associated with show business, even in sport, were seen of low social standing. While the crowds would have their favourites and some competitors would become very famous as a result, sportsmen were typically slaves, criminals or war captives.

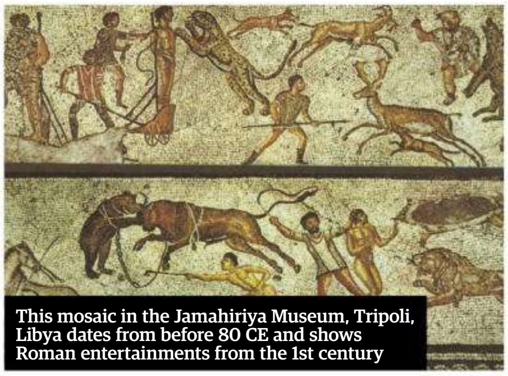
In light of that, it's very easy to say that the Romans saw them as dispensable and that the crowds had a true sadistic streak. But while that is certainly going to be true of some of those who attended, in reality Roman sport was actually symbolic. Gladiatorial bouts had their origins in the funeral ceremonies of wealthy nobles (the first was a combat staged in honour of Junius Brutus Pera in 264 BCE, with three slaves having been selected to fight at the Forum Boarium cattle market). In that instance, it was less about the thrill of a kill and more about the belief that spilt blood would help purify the soul of the deceased.

The fights bestowed political prestige on a family, which is why the funeral shows became more elaborate, involving greater numbers of gladiators. Eventually, leaders began to stage them as entertainment in their own right, again for the popularity it brought them.

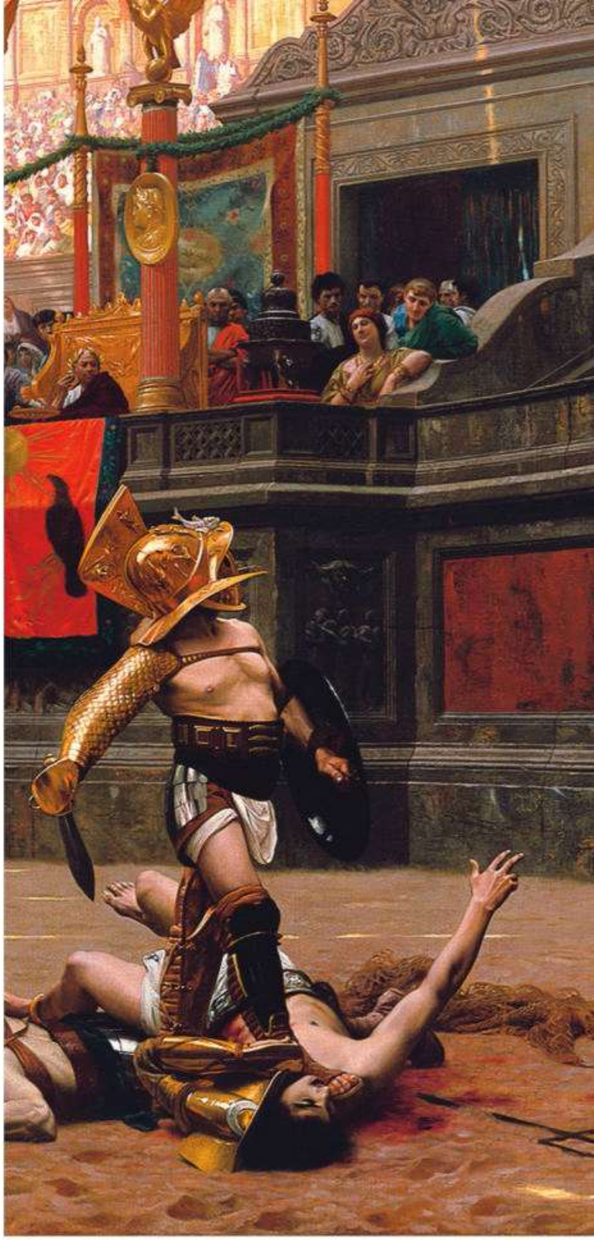
The crowds enjoyed more than blood being spilt, too: there were complex rules and regulations, and gladiators would have their own fighting styles. The contests could be very tactical.

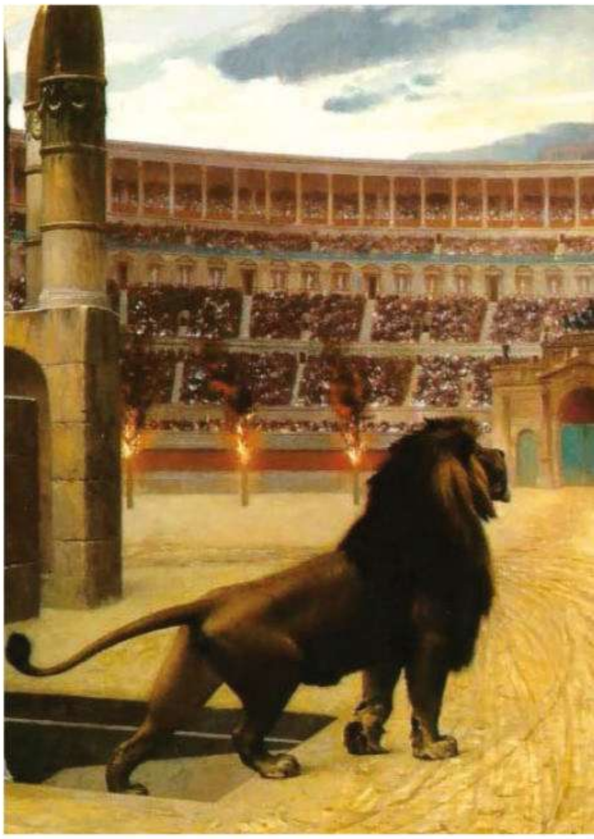
Crowds loved to see certain skills pitted against each other. Many Romans thrived on the shows between sword-and-shield murmillo and Thraex gladiators, for instance. Their different sized shields forced them to adopt different ways of harming their opponent and it lent an exciting tactical air to the proceedings. This love of mashing-up of styles extended to other ancient sports: getting different animals to face off - elephants against lions, perhaps - got the crowds very giddy indeed.

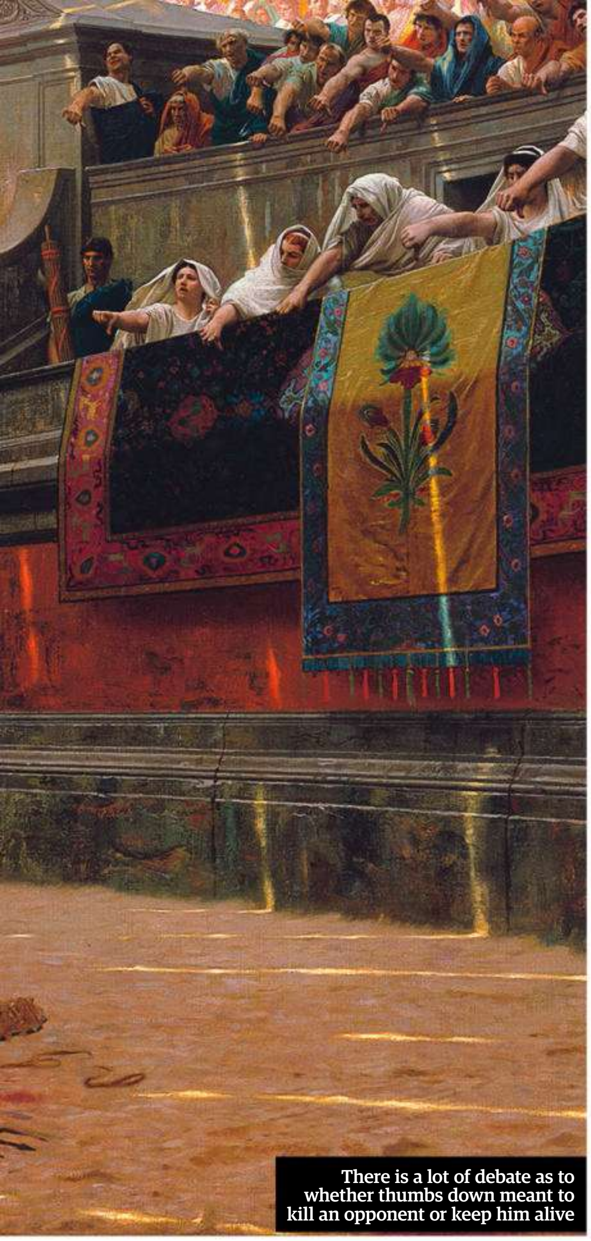
But there were other reasons for sport that could be starkly seen at the chariot races, which were a betting man's dream. As the charioteers - slaves or former slaves backed by large expert teams of trainers, vets and blacksmiths - competed over 12 daily races (or 24 under chariot race fanatic Caligula), much money was won and lost. There would be four teams - the Whites, Reds, Blues and Greens - and the addition of money only served to enhance the thrill. Not that it was any less dangerous a sport, with many riders suffering injury or death. More gentle were the trick-riding exhibitions, which tended to be staged alongside the races.



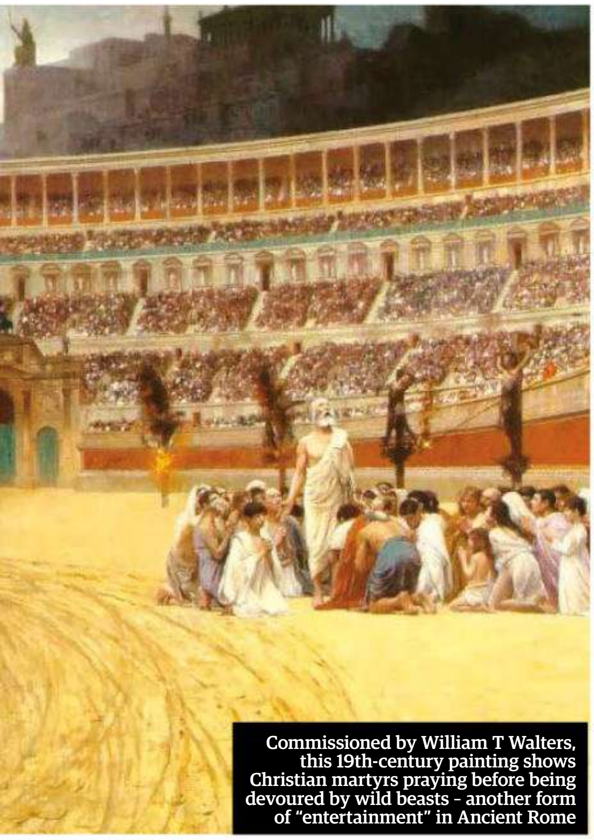
This mosaic in the Jamahiriya Museum, Tripoli, Libya dates from before 80 CE and shows Roman entertainments from the 1st century







There is a lot of debate as to whether thumbs down meant to kill an opponent or keep him alive



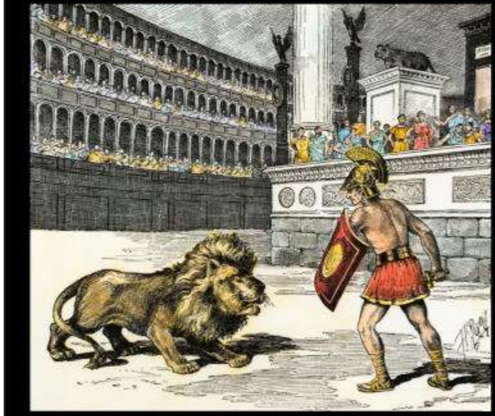
Commissioned by William T Walters, this 19th-century painting shows Christian martyrs praying before being devoured by wild beasts - another form of "entertainment" in Ancient Rome

Rome's most popular sports

Sports and entertainment were synonymous in Ancient Rome, as athletes became famous icons that drew huge crowds

Gladiators

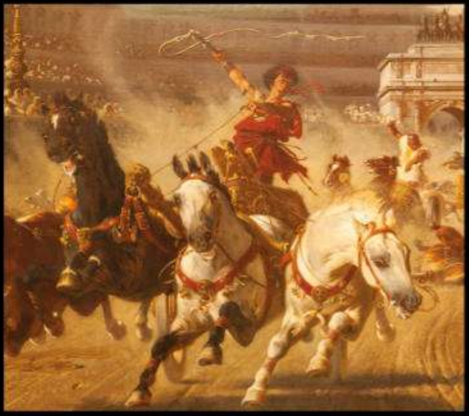
Rather than involve multiple gladiators in a unruly fight to the death, gladiatorial combats came to be structured, refereed battles between two well-trained men. Schooling in the art of fighting would take many years and expense so while emperors in the Colosseum and the excitable crowd at venues elsewhere would decide whether to spare a gladiator. There was actually a reluctance to do so given the fees trainers would command for deaths.



The most popular of all spectator sports, armed men in violent fights had Roman's flocking to arenas

Chariot racing

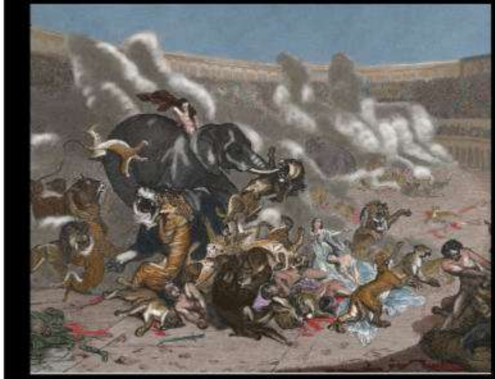
Chariot racing was one of the few sports women could watch and it came with its own terrifying dangers. Up to 300,000 people would pack the long, narrow Circus Maximus on Palatine Hill as teams of charioteers scorched the earth completing seven anti-clockwise laps. Chariots would typically be pulled by four horses but sometimes more. There would be many heart-in-mouth moments as wheels smashed into stone and riders as the rider jostled for position.



It's said that Rome's founder Romulus used chariot racing to distract the Sabine men

Wild beasts

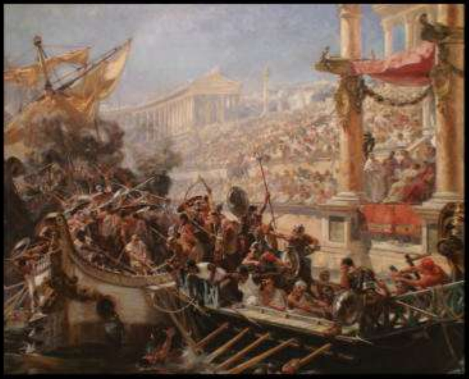
Roman crowds would start the day watching huntsmen in the arenas to showing their skills. Wild beasts, from elephants to lions, would also be thrown together in combat. Arenas would be decorated with trees and shrubs for a greater spectacle and the crowds lapped up man's dominance over nature. Audiences also liked watching men enter the arena to fight animals too: massive audiences would flock to see a sideline of Christians and convicted criminals getting mauled.



Whether called to do tricks or to fight against each other wild beasts played a part in sporting life

Water sports

The huge space of the amphitheatres would be flooded with water so that competitors could engage in gigantic naval battles. This would happen at both the Colosseum and Circus Maximus where small ancient vessels would battle it out. It tapped into the Roman love of a great spectacle and appealed to an emperors penchant for showing off. Eventually lakes would be used for this purpose and the captives who competed in them were called naiunachiarii.



The staging of naval battles as mass entertainment would have been an amazing spectacle

> "Audiences also liked watching men enter the arena… massive audiences would flock to see Christians and convicted criminals getting mauled"

Fun plays and serious plays

Romans got into their rhythm by setting down to a riot of dance, poetry and theatre while still finding time to exercise and relax

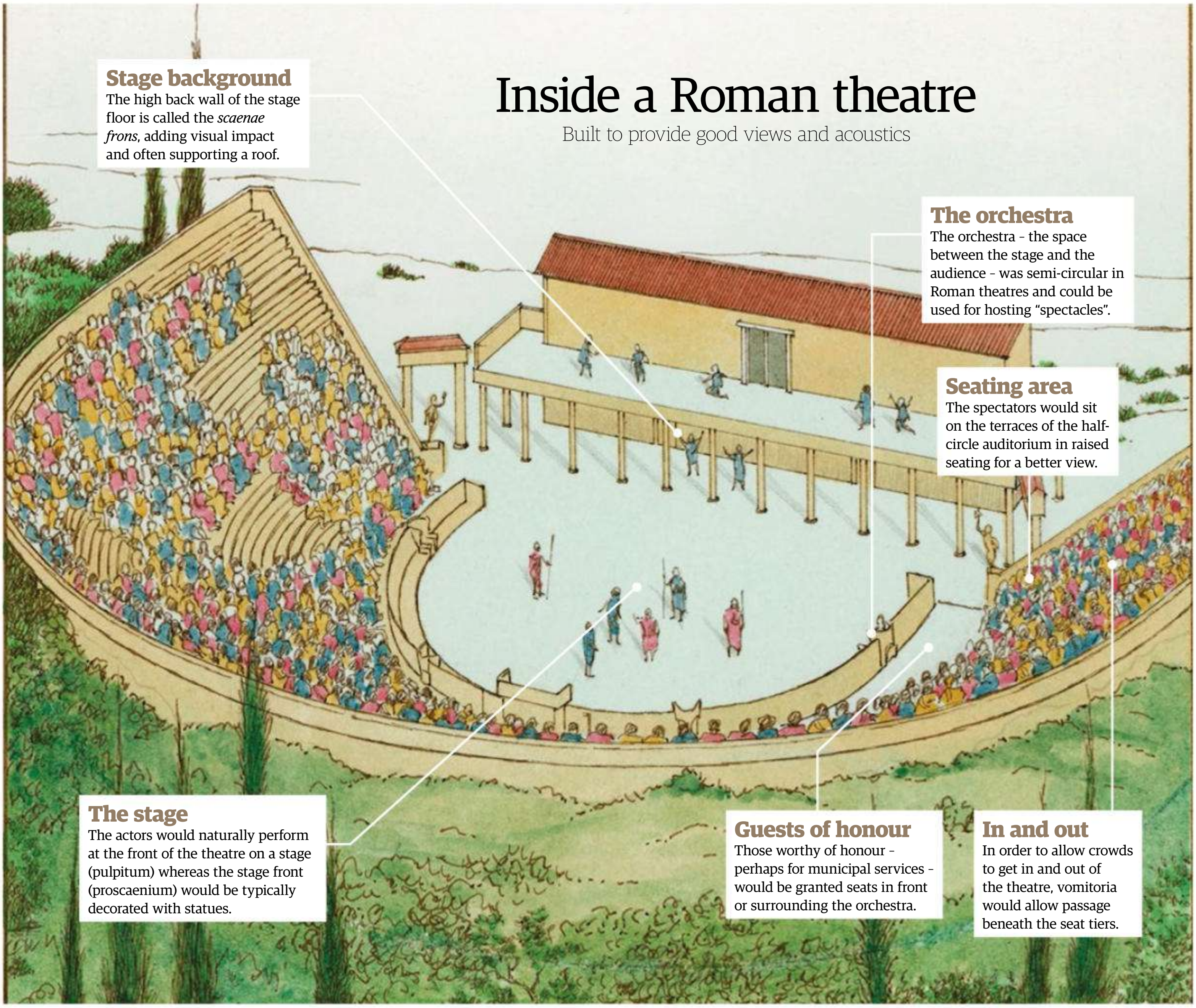
While the Romans preferred the large spectacles of gladiatorial battles and chariot racing, there was still room for more intellectual entertainment. The empire's theatres were based upon those of Greece and they became home to musicals, traditional plays and situation comedies. There was poetry based around morality and patriotism, as well as farce and satire. And while it appears the Romans felt their art did not measure up to Greek art, there was much high-style output.

The Roman historian Livy suggested the first theatre performance was held in 364 BCE, with dancers and musicians brought over from Etruria in the belief they could stop a plague. Mime became very popular, bringing together song and spoken dialogue with farcical scenes brought to life in an exaggerated manner. But it was pantomime - a Roman invention - that struck a greater chord. Audiences loved how the non-speaking masked dancers would use their body and rhythmic gestures to portray various characters.

The Greco-Roman dramatist and epic poet Lucius Livius Andronicus, born in c.284 BCE, translated Greek works into Latin and heralded the beginning of popular, serious dramas. Later, Titus Maccius Plautus introduced literary comedy, producing more than 130 plays, of which just 20 have survived intact. Publius Terentius Afer - or Terence - wrote *Andria* (*The Girl from Andros*), a comedy much beloved by the day's most popular playwright, Caecilius Statius. Tragedies, however, were less popular, and that has been said to be due to the large size of theatres being acoustically unsuitable for spoken dialogue.

Inside a Roman theatre

Built to provide good views and acoustics



Stage background
The high back wall of the stage floor is called the *scaenae frons*, adding visual impact and often supporting a roof.

The orchestra
The orchestra - the space between the stage and the audience - was semi-circular in Roman theatres and could be used for hosting "spectacles".

Seating area
The spectators would sit on the terraces of the half-circle auditorium in raised seating for a better view.

The stage
The actors would naturally perform at the front of the theatre on a stage (pulpitum) whereas the stage front (proscaenium) would be typically decorated with statues.

Guests of honour
Those worthy of honour - perhaps for municipal services - would be granted seats in front or surrounding the orchestra.

In and out
In order to allow crowds to get in and out of the theatre, vomitoria would allow passage beneath the seat tiers.

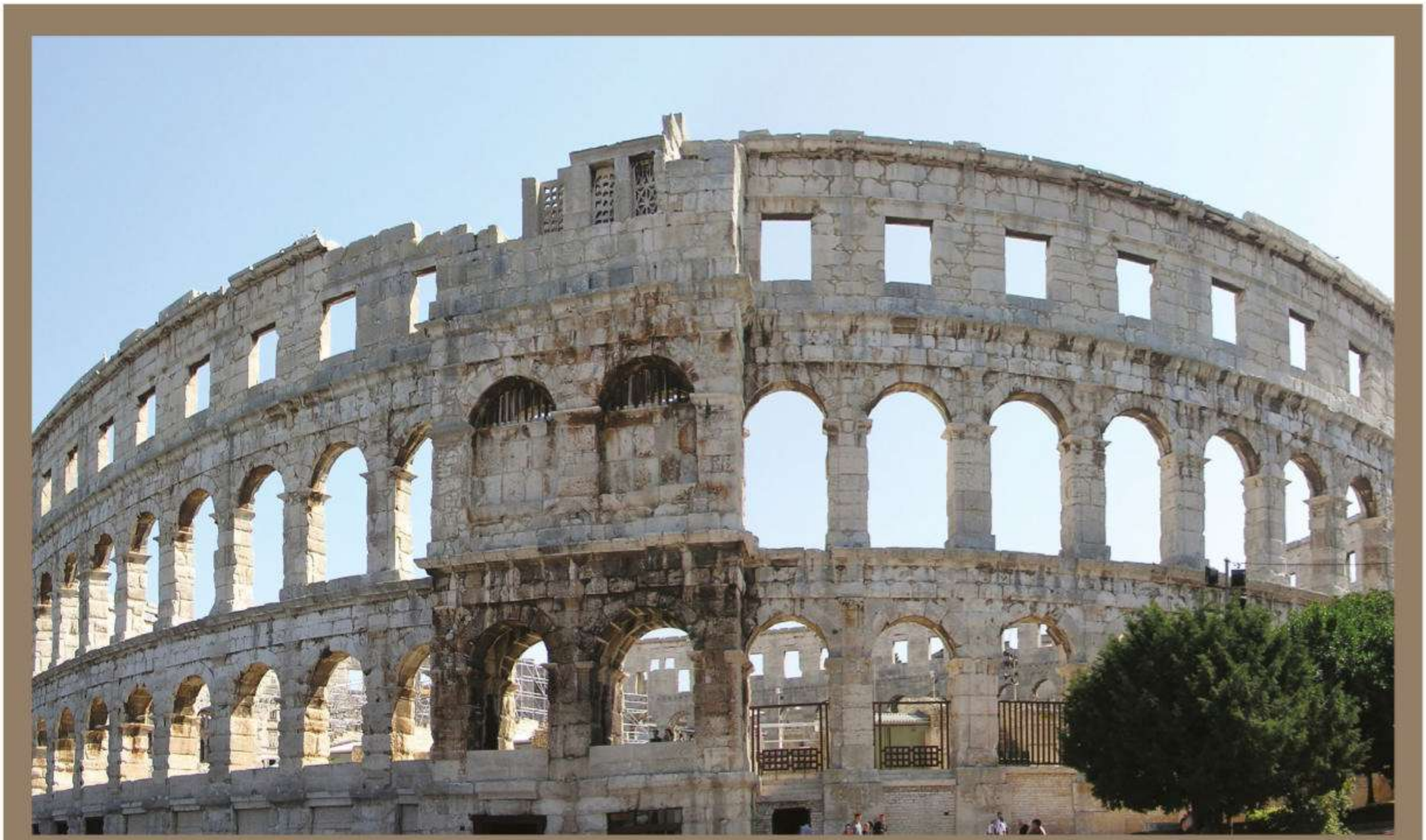
Indeed, theatres would hold up to 15,000 people and would often be packed. So to help crowds in the worst of the seating identify what was going on, the character's clothing would indicate their status and role: rich men would wear purple, poor men red; soldiers wore short cloaks and slave short tunics. There would be stock characters, particularly in comedy, with women eventually appearing in plays, sometimes naked, but usually in heavy masks.

Men and women were generally segregated in social settings and this included the popular baths where Romans would go to clean and relax for hours on end while socialising with friends and acquaintances. There would be separate bath times, with men bathing in the afternoon, and facilities to exercise. The bathhouses also doubled as performance venues (as did the streets outside) with acrobats and jugglers on hand to provide quick, fun entertainment. For the more learned, libraries within the buildings would make books available to read.

There were 29 libraries in Rome by 350 CE with citizens enjoying reading long strips of papyrus

Exercise facilities were also provided, again tapping into their desire for fitness. It wasn't as fanatical a pursuit as it was for the Greeks but gyms and open spaces were provided. Some Romans enjoyed playing ball games, notably Trigon. It involved three people standing in a triangle, throwing the ball with the left hand and catching it with the right. Athletes would also compete in public games and festivals – effectively days of rest for the rest of the population since they didn't observe weekends. Work hard, play hard seemed to be the motto.

> "Men bathed in the afternoon, and facilities to exercise"



Remnants of theatres and stadia found

The most famous of all Rome's stadia is the Colosseum, completed in 80 CE. It took almost ten years to build, and while it was started under the reign of Vespasian, it was finally opened by his son, Emperor Titus. But it was just one of the many Roman stadia, amphitheatres and theatres, hundreds of which were spread across the provinces.

The Romans brought their own engineering skills; unlike in Greece, open-air theatres didn't need to be built in sunken ground because their hemispheres could be erected on vaults. There is evidence of these structures across former Roman lands, and they still stand today.

In Britain, Chester's Roman amphitheatre from 1 CE was the largest, but remains have also been found in Silchester, Colchester, Cirencester, Dorchester, London and St Albans among other towns and cities. Archaeologists in Córdoba, Spain, found Europe's second largest amphitheatre (after the Colosseum) in 2003. Good examples to visit are the Uthina and El Djem amphitheatres in Tunisia, the Verona Arena in Italy and the magnificent Pula Arena in Croatia.

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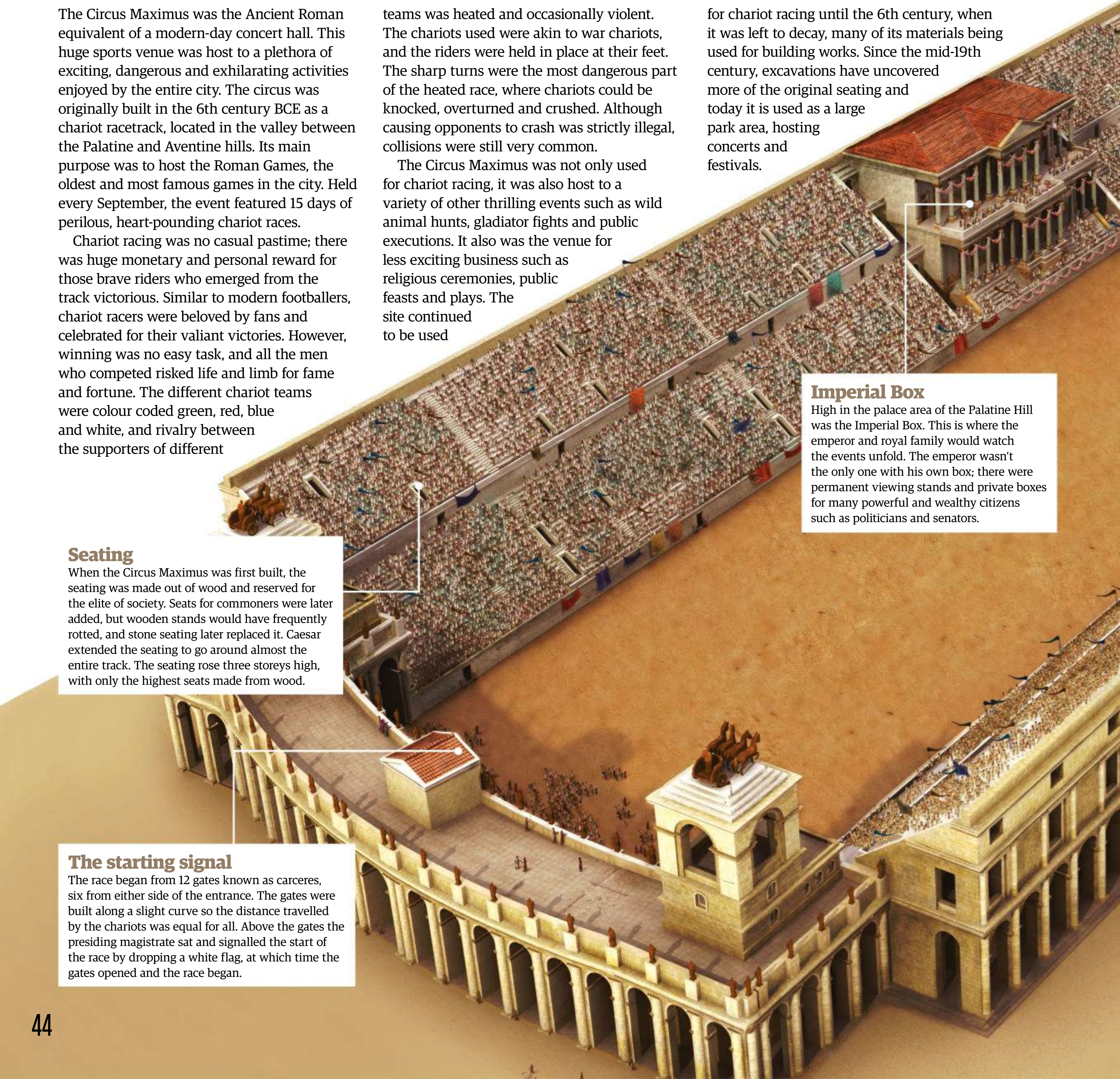
Circus Maximus

Discover the arenas in which Rome's best would duke it out for the entertainment of the masses

The Circus Maximus was the Ancient Roman equivalent of a modern-day concert hall. This huge sports venue was host to a plethora of exciting, dangerous and exhilarating activities enjoyed by the entire city. The circus was originally built in the 6th century BCE as a chariot racetrack, located in the valley between the Palatine and Aventine hills. Its main purpose was to host the Roman Games, the oldest and most famous games in the city. Held every September, the event featured 15 days of perilous, heart-pounding chariot races.

Chariot racing was no casual pastime; there was huge monetary and personal reward for those brave riders who emerged from the track victorious. Similar to modern footballers, chariot racers were beloved by fans and celebrated for their valiant victories. However, winning was no easy task, and all the men who competed risked life and limb for fame and fortune. The different chariot teams were colour coded green, red, blue and white, and rivalry between the supporters of different teams was heated and occasionally violent. The chariots used were akin to war chariots, and the riders were held in place at their feet. The sharp turns were the most dangerous part of the heated race, where chariots could be knocked, overturned and crushed. Although causing opponents to crash was strictly illegal, collisions were still very common.

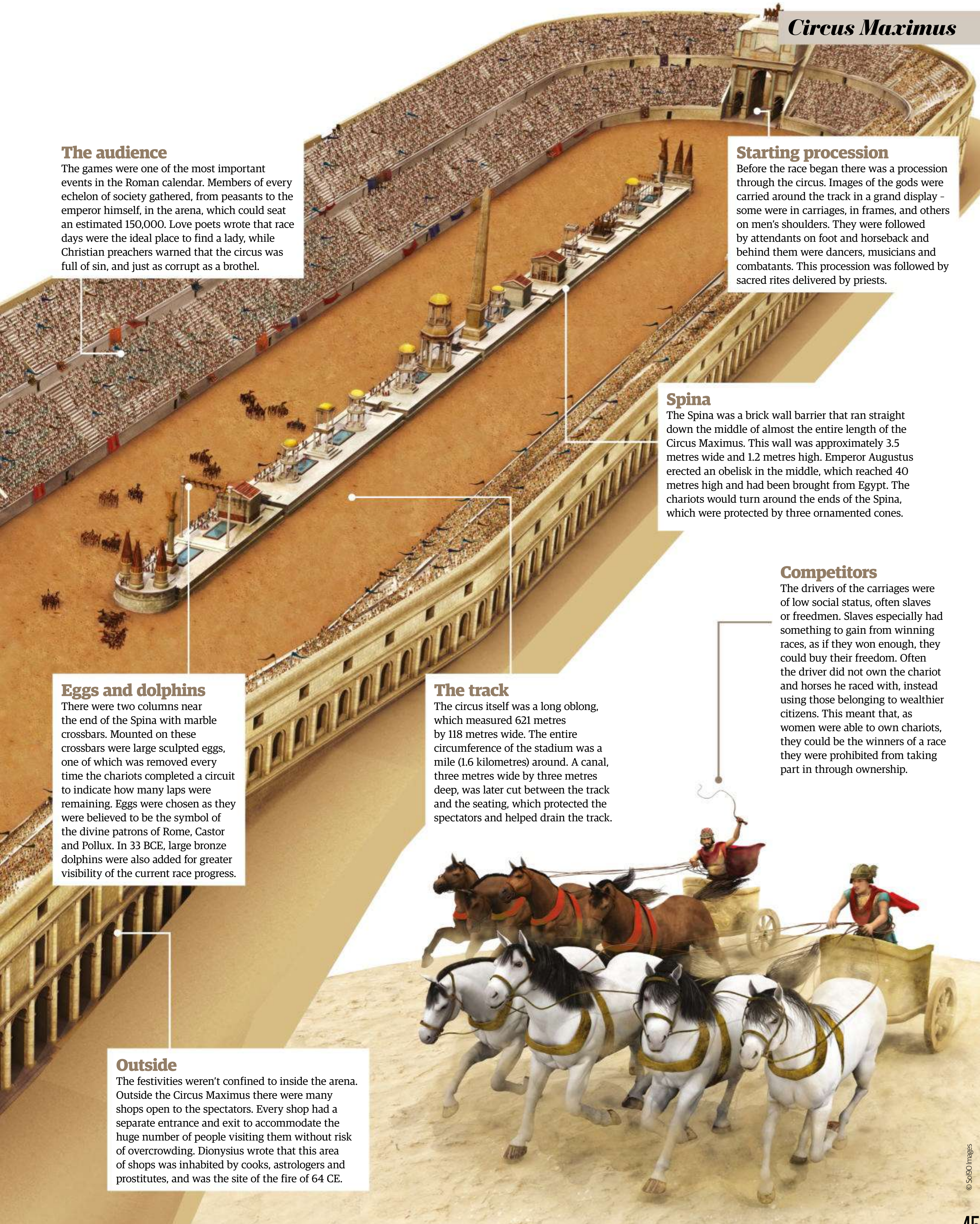
The Circus Maximus was not only used for chariot racing, it was also host to a variety of other thrilling events such as wild animal hunts, gladiator fights and public executions. It also was the venue for less exciting business such as religious ceremonies, public feasts and plays. The site continued to be used for chariot racing until the 6th century, when it was left to decay, many of its materials being used for building works. Since the mid-19th century, excavations have uncovered more of the original seating and today it is used as a large park area, hosting concerts and festivals.



Imperial Box
High in the palace area of the Palatine Hill was the Imperial Box. This is where the emperor and royal family would watch the events unfold. The emperor wasn't the only one with his own box; there were permanent viewing stands and private boxes for many powerful and wealthy citizens such as politicians and senators.

Seating
When the Circus Maximus was first built, the seating was made out of wood and reserved for the elite of society. Seats for commoners were later added, but wooden stands would have frequently rotted, and stone seating later replaced it. Caesar extended the seating to go around almost the entire track. The seating rose three storeys high, with only the highest seats made from wood.

The starting signal
The race began from 12 gates known as carceres, six from either side of the entrance. The gates were built along a slight curve so the distance travelled by the chariots was equal for all. Above the gates the presiding magistrate sat and signalled the start of the race by dropping a white flag, at which time the gates opened and the race began.



The audience

The games were one of the most important events in the Roman calendar. Members of every echelon of society gathered, from peasants to the emperor himself, in the arena, which could seat an estimated 150,000. Love poets wrote that race days were the ideal place to find a lady, while Christian preachers warned that the circus was full of sin, and just as corrupt as a brothel.

Starting procession

Before the race began there was a procession through the circus. Images of the gods were carried around the track in a grand display – some were in carriages, in frames, and others on men's shoulders. They were followed by attendants on foot and horseback and behind them were dancers, musicians and combatants. This procession was followed by sacred rites delivered by priests.

Spina

The Spina was a brick wall barrier that ran straight down the middle of almost the entire length of the Circus Maximus. This wall was approximately 3.5 metres wide and 1.2 metres high. Emperor Augustus erected an obelisk in the middle, which reached 40 metres high and had been brought from Egypt. The chariots would turn around the ends of the Spina, which were protected by three ornamented cones.

Competitors

The drivers of the carriages were of low social status, often slaves or freedmen. Slaves especially had something to gain from winning races, as if they won enough, they could buy their freedom. Often the driver did not own the chariot and horses he raced with, instead using those belonging to wealthier citizens. This meant that, as women were able to own chariots, they could be the winners of a race they were prohibited from taking part in through ownership.

Eggs and dolphins

There were two columns near the end of the Spina with marble crossbars. Mounted on these crossbars were large sculpted eggs, one of which was removed every time the chariots completed a circuit to indicate how many laps were remaining. Eggs were chosen as they were believed to be the symbol of the divine patrons of Rome, Castor and Pollux. In 33 BCE, large bronze dolphins were also added for greater visibility of the current race progress.

The track

The circus itself was a long oblong, which measured 621 metres by 118 metres wide. The entire circumference of the stadium was a mile (1.6 kilometres) around. A canal, three metres wide by three metres deep, was later cut between the track and the seating, which protected the spectators and helped drain the track.

Outside

The festivities weren't confined to inside the arena. Outside the Circus Maximus there were many shops open to the spectators. Every shop had a separate entrance and exit to accommodate the huge number of people visiting them without risk of overcrowding. Dionysius wrote that this area of shops was inhabited by cooks, astrologers and prostitutes, and was the site of the fire of 64 CE.

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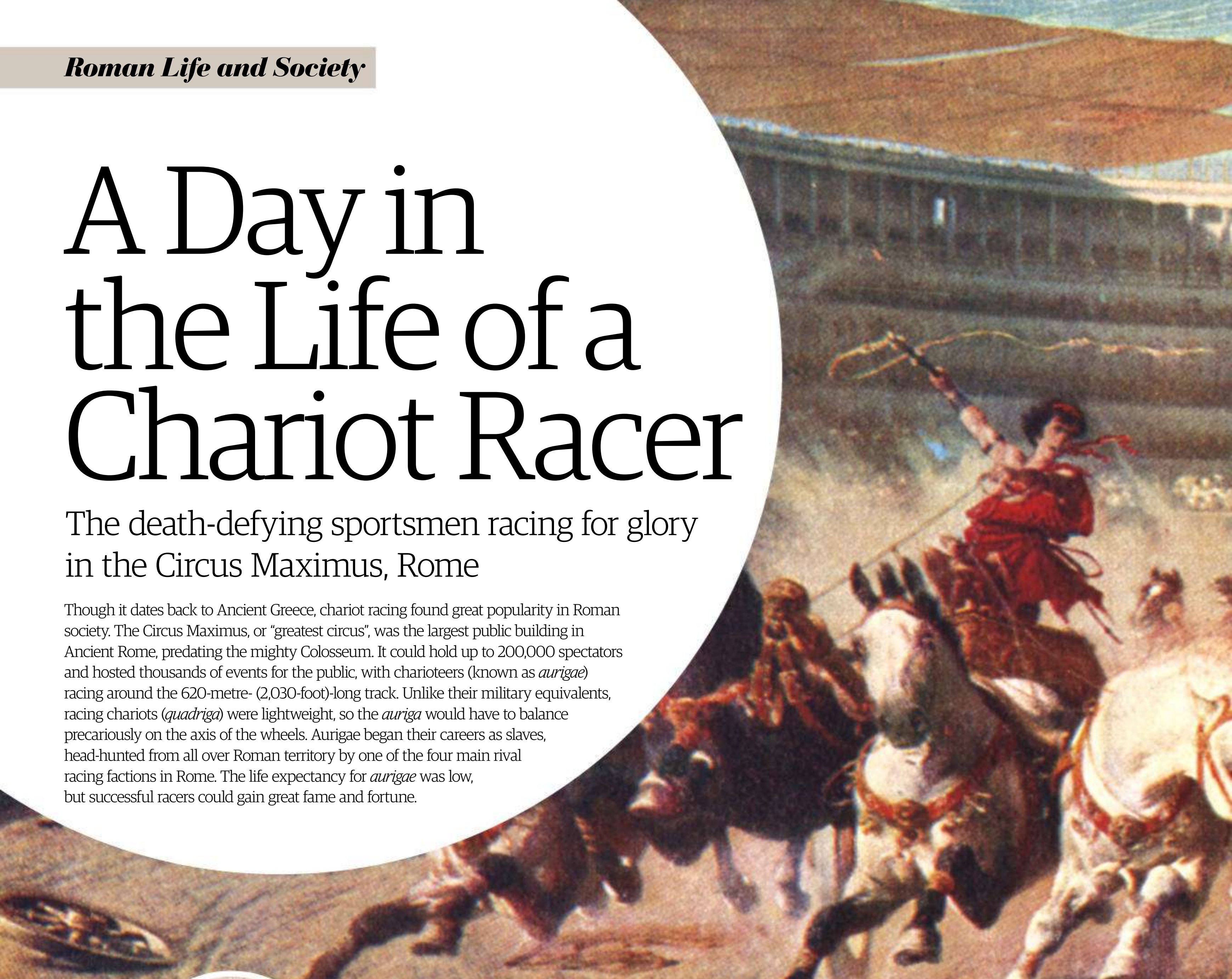
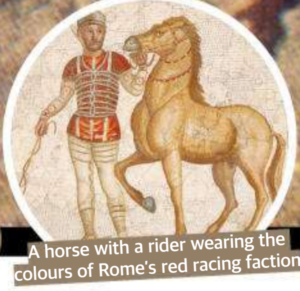


A Day in the Life of a Chariot Racer

The death-defying sportsmen racing for glory in the Circus Maximus, Rome

Though it dates back to Ancient Greece, chariot racing found great popularity in Roman society. The Circus Maximus, or "greatest circus", was the largest public building in Ancient Rome, predating the mighty Colosseum. It could hold up to 200,000 spectators and hosted thousands of events for the public, with charioteers (known as *aurigae*) racing around the 620-metre- (2,030-foot)-long track. Unlike their military equivalents, racing chariots (*quadriga*) were lightweight, so the *auriga* would have to balance precariously on the axis of the wheels. Aurigae began their careers as slaves, head-hunted from all over Roman territory by one of the four main rival racing factions in Rome. The life expectancy for *aurigae* was low, but successful racers could gain great fame and fortune.



A horse with a rider wearing the colours of Rome's red racing faction

PREPARATION AT THE STABLES

Each chariot team paid handsomely for the finest horses, and the animals were often prized higher than most aurigae. Before a race, the stable would be busy with slaves preparing the quadriga with the faction's colours. The conditor – the overseer of the stable – would be ensuring all the horses and the aurigae were ready for the race ahead.

TRAINING FOR THE MAIN EVENT

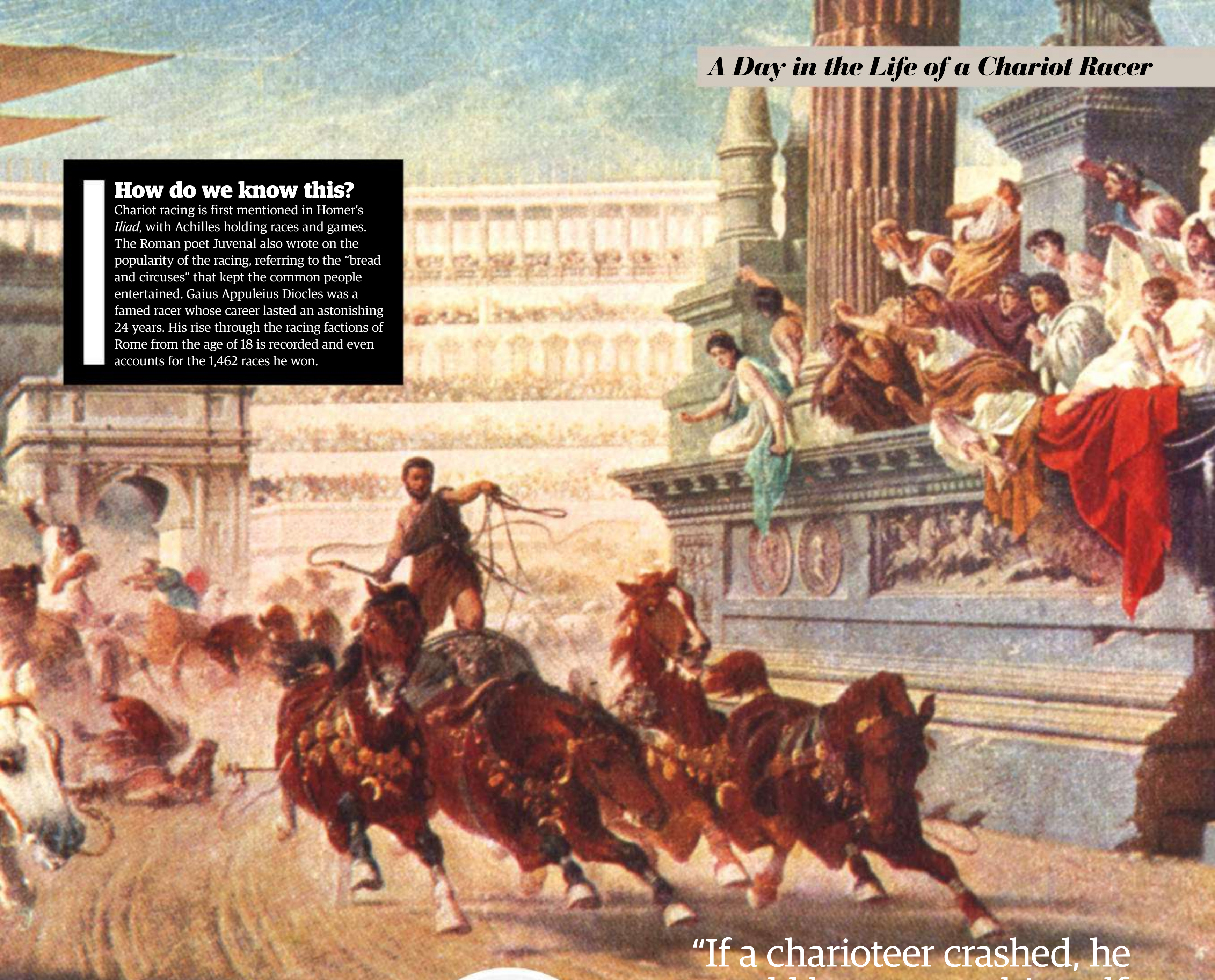
The horse at the far left of the four pulling the chariot would be the best trained, as it would have to be fearless when sprinting next to the spina, the central island running at the centre of the circus track. Each auriga would be skilled at controlling all his horses, which sometimes numbered as many as eight – they directed with their left hand and whipped with the right.

SABOTAGE, BETTING AND CURSING

The bitter rivalry between the racing factions was felt just as strongly by their supporters. There are accounts of curses written on tablets, applying to the gods to bring misfortune to the opposing charioteers. Horses would sometimes be poisoned by rival fans, or even the stable staff of an opposing faction, so even before the race the chariot racer had to be on their guard.

OPENING PARADE

A great procession, led by the main sponsor of that day's race – yes, there were sponsors even back then – would begin the day's events. It was usual for certain gods to be selected to be honoured on race day, so priests carrying statues of Mars and Jupiter, for example, would also be in the procession. Musicians and the teams would also be in the parade, flying the respective colours of their faction to the assembled crowd.



How do we know this?

Chariot racing is first mentioned in Homer's *Iliad*, with Achilles holding races and games. The Roman poet Juvenal also wrote on the popularity of the racing, referring to the "bread and circuses" that kept the common people entertained. Gaius Appuleius Diocles was a famed racer whose career lasted an astonishing 24 years. His rise through the racing factions of Rome from the age of 18 is recorded and even accounts for the 1,462 races he won.

Chariot races often ended in fatalities, with aurigae crashing at incredible speeds

> "If a charioteer crashed, he would have to cut himself free from the reins or likely be trampled to death"

Crashes were common and would often cause a pile-up near the inside track

STARTING POSITIONS

Up to 12 chariot teams, three from each faction, would gather at the start line in the carceres, or starting gates, that were built across the width of the track. Each charioteer would strap the four reins of the horses around his waist, so he could better control the animals with his weight alone. They would all be looking for the mittere signum, or signal to start the race, given by an official, such as a magistrate or city praetor.

RACING

At the start of the race there would be an instant scrap to gain a good position on the course, which was as close to the spina as possible. Racers would gain the upper hand on their opponents by colliding with their chariots, as well as spurring their horses on with a whip. If a charioteer crashed, he would have to quickly cut himself free from the reins with his knife or likely be trampled to death by his competitors.

VICTORY LAP

The victorious charioteer would be presented with a palm branch and a laurel by the race official. The entire race team would receive prize money and would parade around the Circus to the cheers of their supporters. Particularly successful chariot racers were held up as heroes - particularly by the "mob" - and often able to save enough to buy their own freedom. There are even examples of racers who became extremely wealthy.

PARTY AT THE CLUBHOUSE

Each of the chariot-racing factions in Rome - the red, green, white and blue - had club houses located throughout the city. Here fans and stable staff would gather to celebrate victories and praise their charioteers, even if they merely survived the deadly races. The life expectancy of chariot racers was so short that being alive at the end of the day was cause for celebration.

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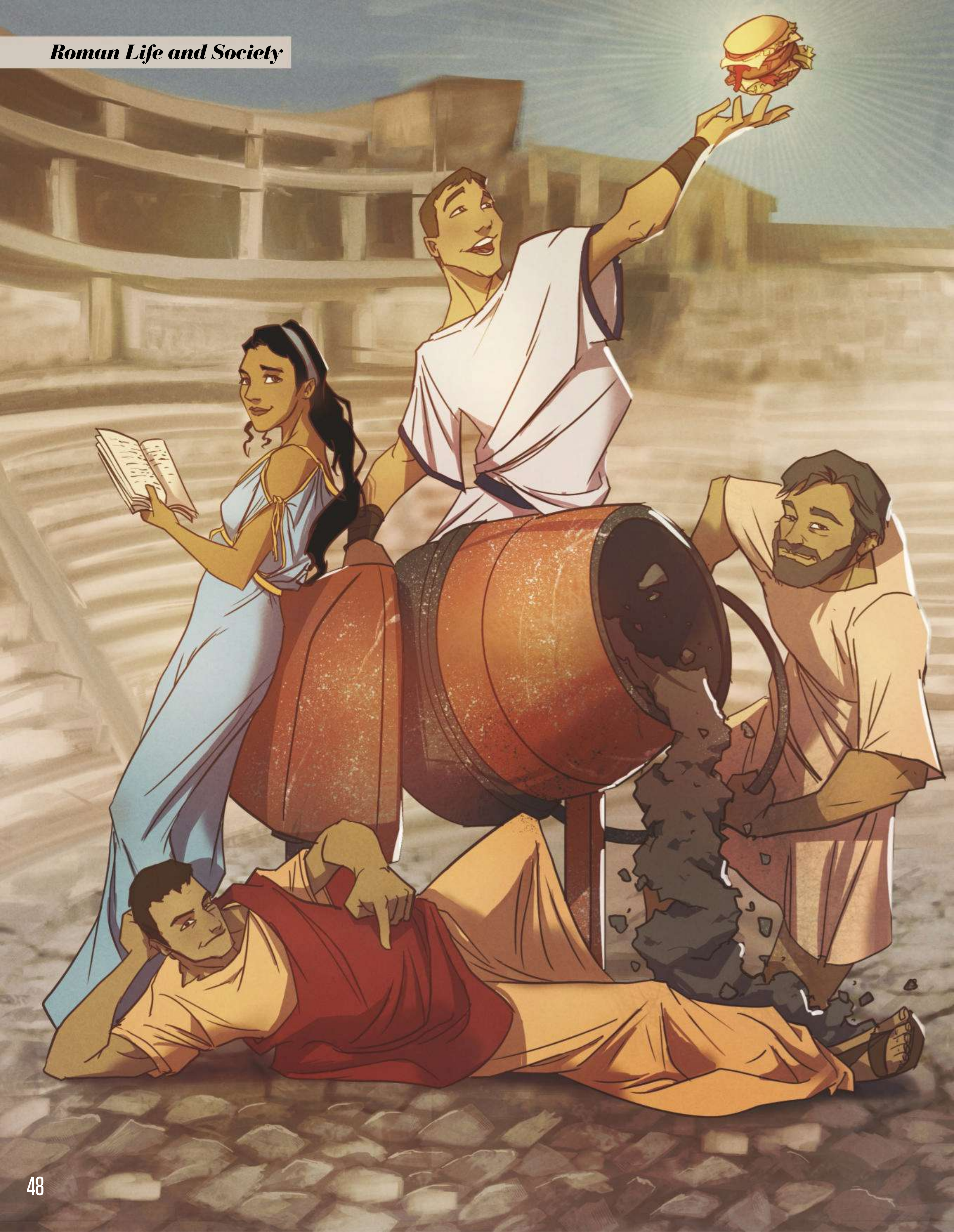


What Have the Romans Done for Us?

They came, they saw and they conquered – and they shaped modern Europe at the same time

At its height, the Roman Empire was sprawled out over more than five million square kilometres. It was the main state on the Mediterranean Sea, and reached as far north as Scotland. It stretched down into North Africa and came to dominate the Middle East and beyond. A nation that big can never really disappear – its culture and traditions seep into the people and the landscape, leaving a legacy that can never truly be scrubbed out.

A lot of Roman ways did vanish over time: paganism died out, with temples being converted into churches or falling into disrepair; gladiators stopped battling it out in the arenas; and phalluses were no longer used as lucky charms. But the Romans had been around for such a long time and almost every part of life across the empire had been Romanised, so their customs proved to be impossible to leave behind.

It's nigh on impossible to count the ways in which the Romans shaped modern Europe both physically and culturally, from language and shopping to entertainment and transport. So here are just ten of the multitude of things that they left behind in Europe after the fall of the Western Roman Empire.

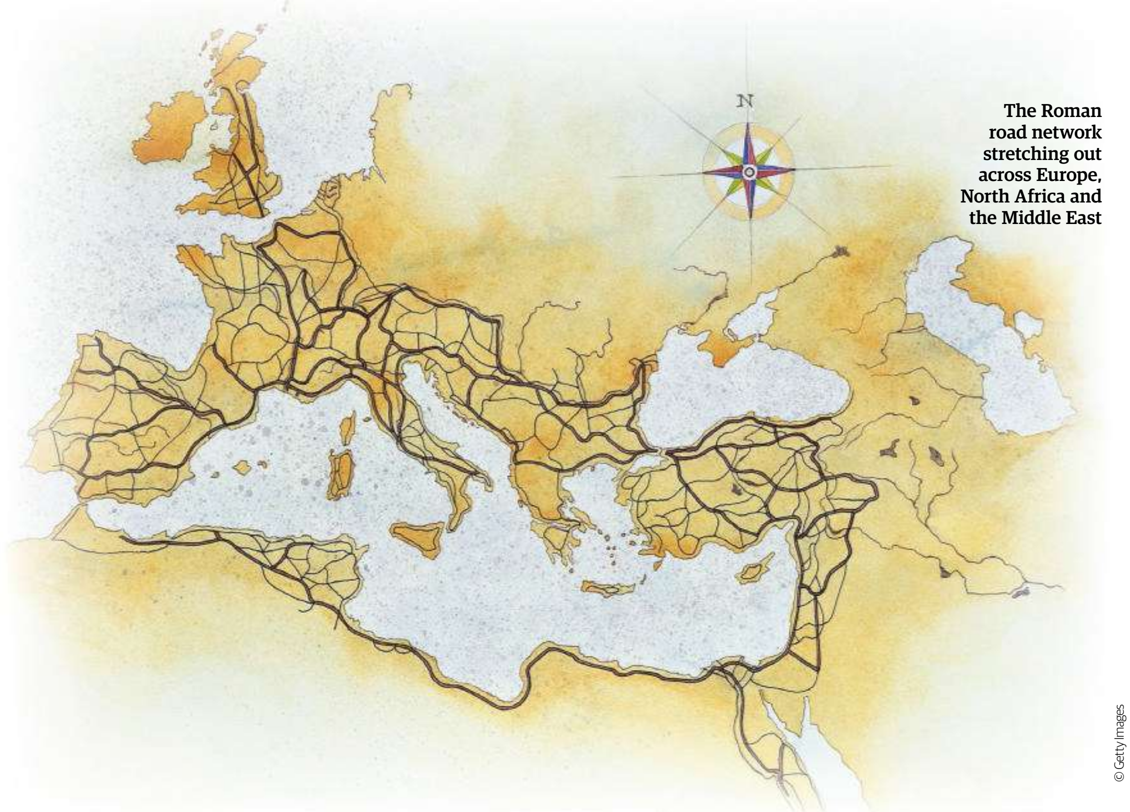
> "The Romans had been around for such a long time and almost every part of life across the empire had been Romanised"

Roads

How to travel around Europe

Not all roads lead to Rome, but some made by the Romans are still in use today. While building materials differed across the empire, the formation was always the same: the road itself was raised, built up in layers of rocks, stones, gravel and sand, with ditches on either side for drainage. Roads were incredibly important in such a vast territory – they sped up movement, allowing troops to get around quicker, and they boosted trade and communication.

Perhaps the most famous example of this in Britain is Watling Street, a name derived from what the Saxons called it. Stretching from modern Dover, though London and up to Wroxeter, Shropshire, it connected the port closest to mainland Europe with the rest of Britannia. It also saw its fair share of history – it was the site of Boudicca's final defeat to the Romans, and it's thought that the pilgrims in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales used it, too. Today it exists as the A2 between Dover and London, and the A5 from London to Wroxeter.



The Roman road network stretching out across Europe, North Africa and the Middle East

© Getty Images

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FVGITE
PARTES ADVERSAE
VICIT LEO
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...S V BVRGHESIVS ROMANVS PONT MAX AN MDCXII

Signs everywhere in Vatican City are written in Latin rather than Italian

© Alamy

Language

You're probably already talking like a Roman

Spoken by the majority of Romans, Latin was the foremost language of the empire and is often referred to as dead. Really, it's anything but. Europe's Romance languages – French, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian and Spanish, among others – have all stemmed from Latin as a result of the widespread Roman occupation. Thanks to their common root, there are a lot of similarities between them, meaning that if you know one, it's easier to learn and understand another. Of course, Germanic languages like German, Dutch and English have also been influenced by Latin.

But Latin itself was widely used across Europe until the Middle Ages as the administrative language for states like the Holy Roman Empire and France. It was also, and still is, the language of the Roman Catholic Church, with services conducted in Medieval Latin, which differs slightly to its Classical parent. The Renaissance didn't stop this, with theological and scientific tomes being written in Latin.

Latin is still used today – animals have Latin classifications, and bones in the body have Latin names, like scapula and coccyx. But one country still uses Latin as its official language: the Vatican City, where you can use an ATM in Latin.

Books

The Romans probably created the first page-turners

We wouldn't necessarily have recognised Roman books as books. Until around the 1st century BCE they were papyrus scrolls that measured anything from 4.5 to 16 metres in length, but they were difficult to read properly and in colder climates they tended to deteriorate. So a new book was created: the codex. A codex had pages, with text running from the front to the back, and the pages were made from parchment. Invented by the Greeks a few centuries prior, parchment was ideal to write on. These pages were then bound between wooden covers, and they could hold more information than the scrolls. It was now easier to disseminate a hefty amount of information in one go, and these new books would last much longer than their predecessors.

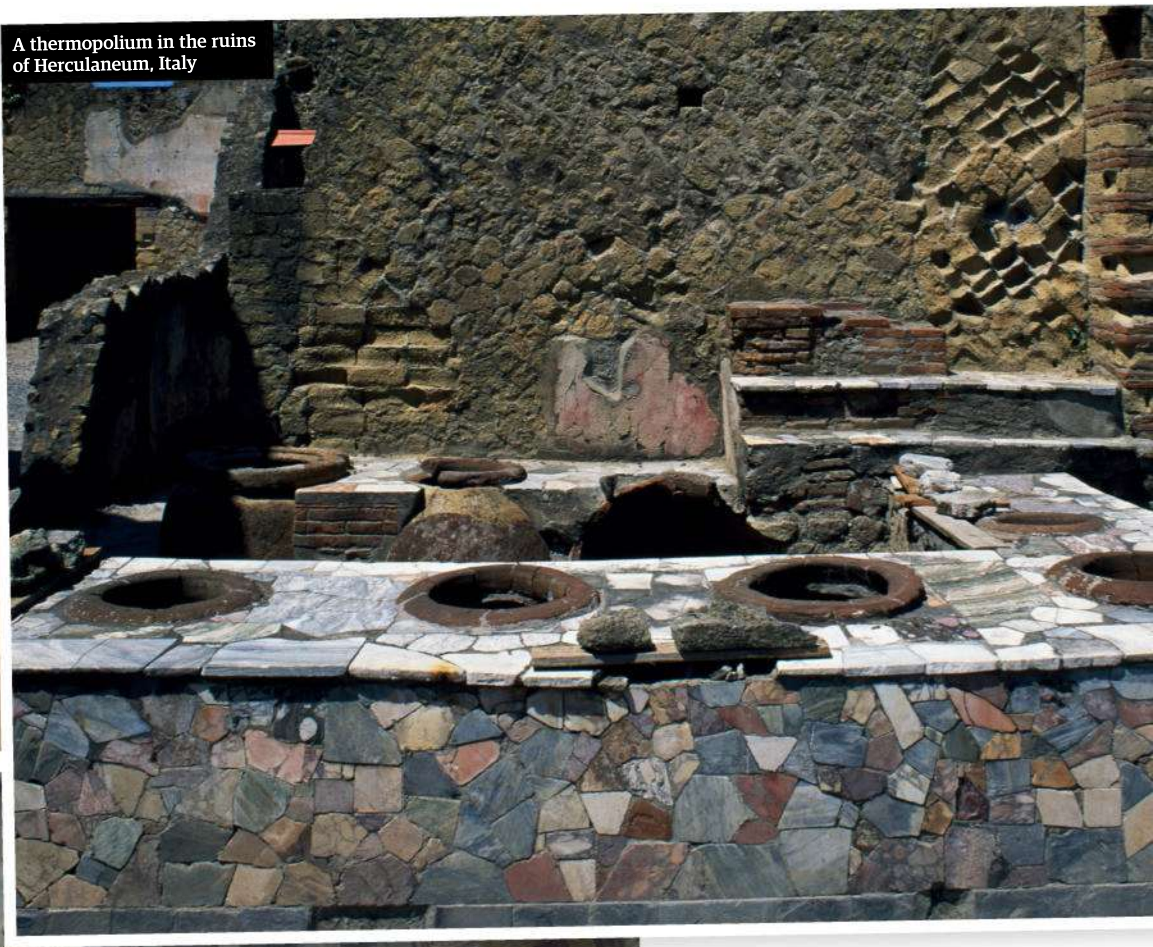
But that wasn't the only Roman innovation to do with writing – they've also been credited with creating the first newspaper. *Acta Diurna*, or *Daily Events*, was also made from papyrus and distributed around Rome so that citizens could keep up to date with weddings, births, deaths, crimes, trials and even the adventures of the rich and famous. Newspapers today haven't really changed that much.

Fast food

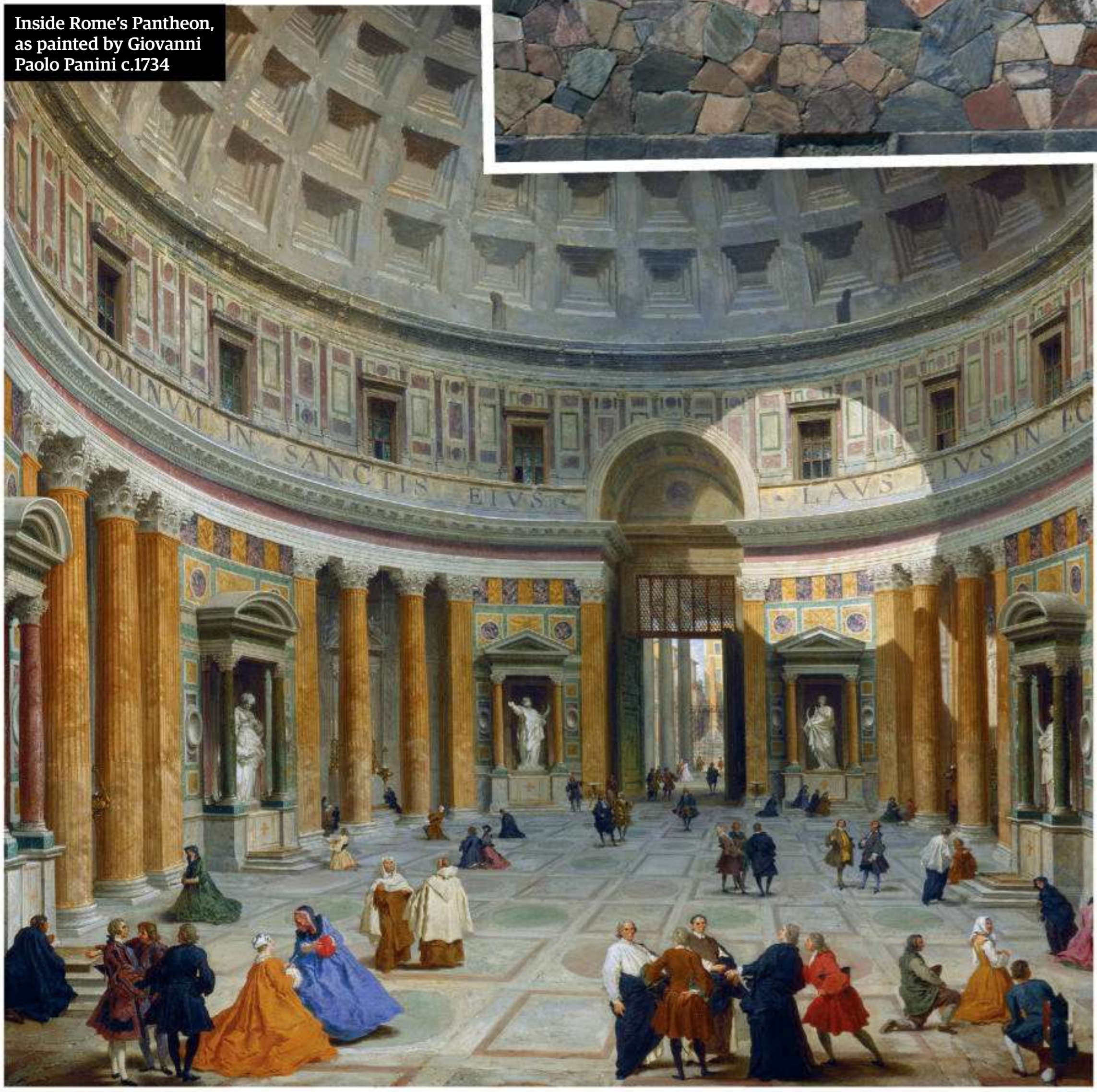
Ancient Rome's answer to Burger King

If you enjoy your food and you like it quick, you should thank the Romans. In Pompeii alone, more than 80 thermopolia (literally 'cook shops') have been found, each one a stone counter with earthenware jars, or dolia, slotted into them to help food and drink stay warm. Often located in marketplaces, they provided a place to grab a quick bite to eat on the go, much like McDonald's or KFC do today.

A Roman thermopolium often sold spiced wine, meats, cheese, fish, lentils and nuts. Classicist and ancient historian Mary Beard has commented that these fast food bars lined the streets in Pompeii – they were the alternative to a meagre diet of bread, cheese and fruit for the poor, as they didn't really have the facilities to cook anything else. While some thermopolia just provided food, others had outdoor seating areas for those who wanted to take their time.



A thermopolium in the ruins of Herculaneum, Italy



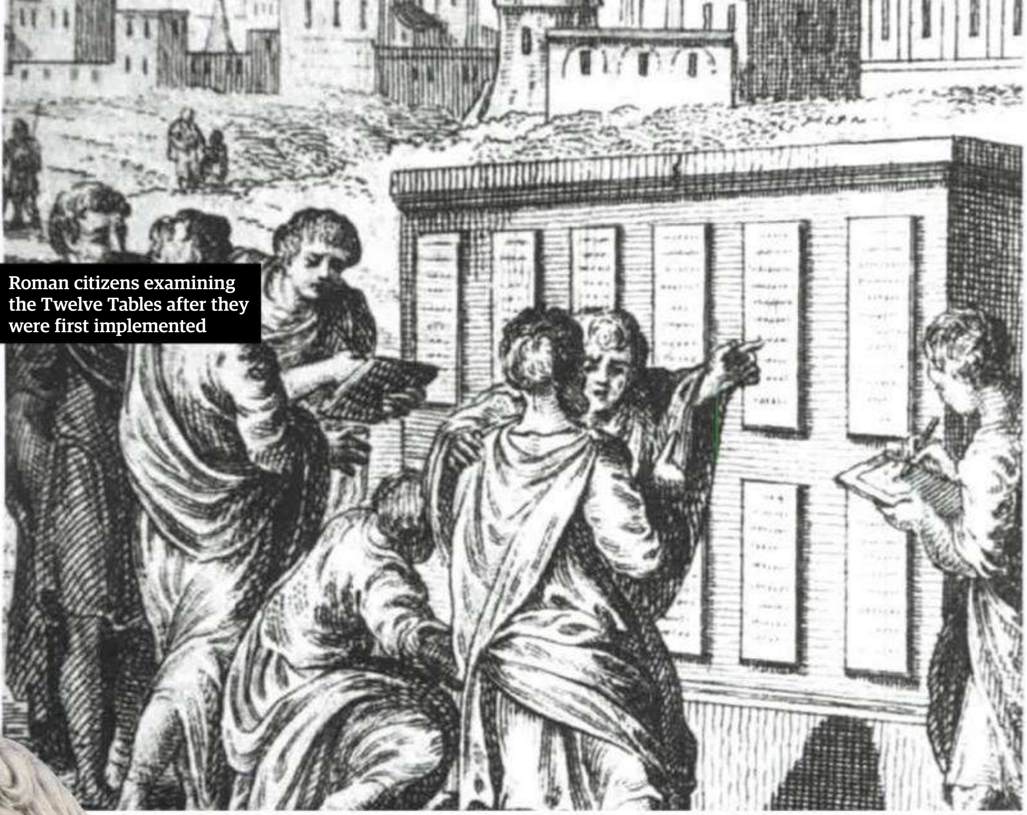
Inside Rome's Pantheon, as painted by Giovanni Paolo Panini c.1734

Large-scale construction

The Romans were more innovative than people realise

If there's one thing the Romans are remembered for today, it's their buildings. Palaces and theatres already existed before them, but what the Romans added to architecture was astounding. Amphitheatres were born for the infamous gladiator bouts. Triumphal arches and columns sprang up all over the empire, commemorating the victories of emperors like Trajan and Titus. Aqueducts carried water to towns and cities that didn't have their own clean water sources. Hadrian built a wall across northern England as a barrier against the barbarian Picts in modern-day Scotland.

One understated achievement, though, was the Pantheon, which still stands in Rome today. Completed in 125 CE, it is possible that it was the first building ever created where the inside is deliberately designed to outshine the outside. The rotunda stretches 43.2 metres in diameter, and is a perfect hemisphere. At the very top is an 8.8-metre-wide oculus, or opening, and the whole dome is crafted from pumice and concrete. It stands as a testament to Roman architecture and building prowess.



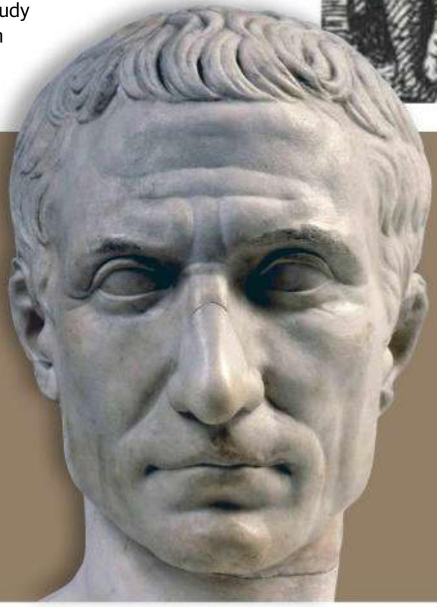
Roman citizens examining the Twelve Tables after they were first implemented

Laws

Time to update the legal system?

It seems crazy that we still use laws created over 2,000 years ago, but it's the truth. The Twelve Tables, which is usually cited as the foundation of ancient Roman law, was a heavy influence on the Bill of Rights at the founding of the United States, and both South Africa and San Marino still base their legal systems on the idea of Jus Commune, or civil law. Fragments of the Twelve Tables still survive today, and we can see that it covered family law and torts, both of which are still extant.

Rome boasted the world's first advanced legal system, and thanks to its far-reaching influence, it's no wonder that it has affected so many others. Law students today can still study it, and it often helps them to understand our own complex legal system.



Julius Caesar, the man responsible for the Julian calendar

The Julian calendar

We've got one man to thank for leap years

Calendars already existed by the time Julius Caesar came to power – the Greeks had created their version, while other civilisations had theirs. Rome had its civic calendar, but it was out of sync with nature, so Caesar decided to change that. He added one extra day every four years because of a calculation that showed it took 365 and one-quarter days for Earth to go around the Sun, not 365. So it was that the so-called Julian calendar had created leap years.

However, the calculations were slightly off – it actually takes us a further 11.5 minutes to go around the Sun each year, so Caesar's calendar was over-correcting to the tune of eight days each millennium. This was finally fixed in the 16th century with the introduction of the Gregorian calendar, named after Pope Gregory XIII, but the idea of leap years stayed. Unfortunately for historians, different countries adopted it at different times, making it very confusing to date some events.

Sanitation and public health

Keeping clean was an important task

While the Romans weren't the first to build sewers in Rome – that credit goes to the Etruscans – the Romans were happy to take them over and keep them in use, even building their own in the city and beyond. But contrary to popular belief, Roman sewers weren't to do with sanitation; they removed water from the streets to prevent flooding.

The Romans also had public toilets; dank and dirty, they weren't pleasant to use, but they served in a pinch. Unlike toilets at home, these were connected to the sewers.

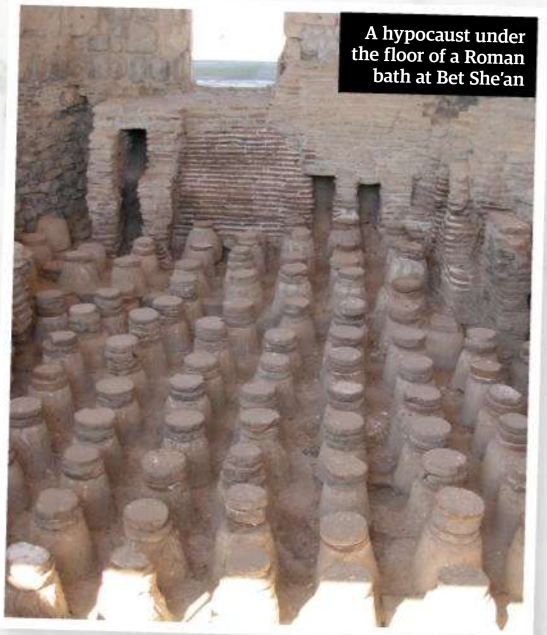
But the most impressive example of public health comes from the Roman baths. Situated in most towns and cities, it was the weekly, or sometimes daily, trips to the thermae that kept Roman citizens clean. A trip included traipsing around rooms of different temperatures and a good scrub, and an exercise ground was attached. This could perhaps be the precursor of the modern gym, with its exercise rooms, swimming pool and sometimes steam rooms and saunas.

Central heating

Keeping your house warm isn't a new idea

How do you keep your house warm in the Roman Empire? With central heating, of course. The Romans were pioneers, and they invented an ingenious way to keep their buildings warm with underfloor heating. A fire or furnace heated the air below the floor in a room, and the air then escaped up the walls. Under the ground floor was a basement hypocaust, which saw stacks of terracotta tiles piled up in a bed of concrete.

Baths across the Roman Empire used this method to heat their hot rooms, or caldaria, and houses in the northern provinces employed it to keep them warm in the colder winter months. The rooms that needed the most heat would be placed closest to the furnace, but it was by no means a cheap option. Only the wealthy could really afford it as it required skilled engineers to build it, and slave labour and copious amounts of fuel to keep the furnaces burning. When the Western Roman Empire fell, central heating in the western provinces fell out of use – it's only been in the past 100 years or so that it has come back.



A hypocaust under the floor of a Roman bath at Bet She'an

Concrete

The reason 2,000-year-old structures are still standing

It may not be the most interesting item on this list, but its importance can't be overstated: Roman concrete was nothing short of fantastic. While our concrete has a lifespan of about 50 years before it begins crumbling, the Roman version has lasted for over 1,000 years and is still going strong. Made to a recipe whipped up by the architect and engineer Marcus Vitruvius around 30 BCE, it's comprised of volcanic ash, lime and seawater, all mixed together with volcanic rocks and spread into wooden moulds, before being plunged into more seawater.

While concrete was used for buildings, it was also used to create piers and harbour walls for one very important reason: it got stronger over time. As seawater reacted with the volcanic ash, it created new minerals that reinforced it. It's for this reason that people have recently started suggesting that we should go back to this ancient concrete – after all, why fix something that hasn't broken for a millennium?

These ruins at Caesarea are the earliest known example of Roman concrete – and they're still standing

© Getty Images

Julius Caesar, pictured here, became the archetype for the Roman emperor to come (both in power and eventual fate)

The Dynasties of the Roman Empire

From its earliest days in the republic, to the final dark days of the empire, the dynasties of Rome shaped the nation and its fate

For four centuries of its existence, Rome was ruled by nine incredibly powerful dynasties and it was under their rule that the nation rose to the height of its power and eventually saw it fall into the hands of Eastern masters. The first of these eras, the Principate, was the first to emerge after the end of the republic where Rome expanded with military might into one of the most powerful nations of the world. The Principate began with the formation of the position of emperor, where the democratic structure of the republic was cast aside and the power of the entire realm was passed into the hands of a single man.

The first of those men, Augustus, was mindful of the dangers of plunging Rome into a political world that the people did not recognise so the Senate was preserved, but the Senate ultimately answered to the seat of the emperor. It was all an illusion, but it was a system that was set in place and lasted for the 300 years of the Principate.

Following the Crisis of the Third Century, the political strata of Rome changed with more power consolidated into the position of emperor. This was the beginning of the Dominate era, where the emperors enacted the personal control over the realm we most closely associate with the Imperial throne. It was also a time of political uncertainty and upheaval, with brief experiments in joint rule (in a paltry imitation of the republican days) and an eventual split in the empire into a disparate East and West that eventually sealed the fate of Rome, and with it the Roman Empire.

> While famous for its political efficiency, the Roman Empire often found itself plagued with political and social unrest

The Julio-Claudian dynasty

27 BCE - 68 CE

The first five emperors of the Roman Empire begins with Augustus, and it is through him that the Principate model of governance (where both Senate and emperor exist, but the Senate ultimately answers to the most powerful man in the realm) is born. Many of these men have no natural heirs, so most use adoption to select their eventual successor and continue the dynasty. From Augustus to Nero, it is a divisive time for the Romans. Political infighting and favouritism see the persecution of certain families considered rivals to the Julio-Claudians with even the Senate itself attempting to regain power at one point. Rome even burns in 64 CE.

Augustus
27 BCE – 14 CE

Tiberius
14 – 37 CE

Rome is now plunged into a year of civil war where four men rise to the title of emperor - Galba, Otho, Vitellius and Vespasian.

Year of the Four Emperors

68 - 69 CE

Following Nero's suicide, Rome is plunged into civil war as rival families aim to install their own candidates as emperor. Before the rise of the Flavians, three men rule: Galba, Otho and Vitellius.

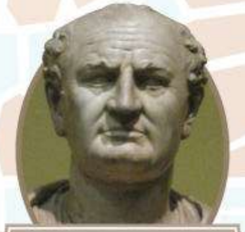
Galba
68 – 69 CE

When Vespasian eventually becomes emperor, he helps bring the civil unrest to a close.

Flavian dynasty

69 - 96 CE

The Flavian dynasty seizes power during the civil war, and while the dynasty's reign is relatively short, the family does make some big changes. The first Flavian emperor Vespasian's new taxes help improve finances, while the addition of silver to Roman coins better the economy.



Vespasian
69 – 79 CE

Titus
79 – 81 CE

Vespasian's second son (and the third Flavian emperor) Domitian is assassinated in 96 CE, and long-time supporter Nerva takes his place.

The Nerva-Antonine dynasty

96 - 192 CE

The seven emperors of the Nerva-Antonine dynasty bring about something of a more peaceful and successful era for Rome. It is a time of healing between emperor, military and people; and it sees some of the most well-liked emperors take the position over a near century of rule. The first three – Nerva, Trajan and Hadrian – renew the policy of adoption in order to secure the right heir. While most of the successive emperors are not father and son, many are related by blood so family ties are secured. This continues with the Antonines – Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Lucius Verus and Commodus. Aurelius and Verus even rule together for a time.

Marcus Aurelius
161 – 180 CE

Commodus
177 – 192 CE

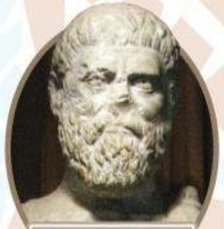
Rome yet again finds itself in a power struggle between a number of influential figures, and a year of murder and deceit follows.

Year of the Five Emperors

193 CE

Following Commodus' assassination, his Praetorian Guard eventually goes on to murder his successor, Pertinax, within three months. Didius Julianus succeeds him, but is executed by Septimius Severus. Severus co-rules while fighting a civil war against another claimant.

Septimius Severus
193 – 211 CE



Pertinax
193 CE

Severus co-rules with Clodius Albinus, who eventually turns on and defeats him in order to take full control of the empire.

Severan dynasty

193 - 235 CE

The final dynasty of Principate sees the end of the civil war, but it also sees the empire's seat of power shaken by political infighting and turmoil that foreshadows the crisis to come.

Elagabalus
218 – 222 CE

Severus Alexander
222 – 235 CE

Severus Alexander is the last of the line, and while he starts off popular, he soon becomes a figure of derision as a series of military faux paxs leave him with his own men's swords in his back.

Maximinus Thrax
235 – 238 CE

Crisis of the Third Century

235 - 284 CE

With the final emperor of the Principate dead in Severus Alexander, and murdered by his generals at that, the empire is plunged into its most bloody internal conflict yet. The Crisis of the Third Century, or the Imperial Crisis, rages for almost 50 years and sees 26 individual men recognised by the Senate as Caesar (thus making them official emperors). The conflict is so severe that it sees the empire divided into three warring states: the Palmyrene Empire (including Roman Egypt and Roman Syria), the Gallic Empire (which consisted of Gaul and Britannia), and the remaining Roman Empire in between.

Aurelian
270 – 275 CE

No one emperor has true control in this period until Aurelian, who unites all three empires and effectively ends the Crisis of the Third Century.

Constantius Chlorus
293 – 306 CE

The Tetrarchy

284 - 313 CE

The end of the Crisis sees a new style of rule where power is divided equally among four men – Diocletian, Galerius, Maximian and Constantius Chlorus. Each one rules a different section of the empire.

Diocletian
284 – 305 CE

Constantine the Great
306 – 337 CE

After 20 years of rule, Diocletian and Maximian abdicate and two more men are made co-caesars. This eventually breaks down, civil war ensues and Chlorus' son, Constantine emerges the victor.

The Constantinian dynasty

306 - 363 CE

The Constantian dynasty sees the first true beginning of the Dominate or 'despot' era, where the concept of a singular powerful rule is dropped and a great deal more power consolidated in the position of emperor, and a series of military and religious upheavals that change the realm forever.

The Constantine line (sometimes known as the Neo-Flavian line, due to each member carrying that name, too) actually begins with Constantius Chlorus during the Tetrarchy, but it isn't until the ascension of his son Constantine the Great when Rome (still divided into an Eastern and Western realm) is united.

Licinius I
308 – 324 CE

The Constantinian line lasts until 364 CE when Jovian, the last of the emperors of that line, dies of natural causes. The army names his replacement…

Valentinian I
364 – 375 CE

The Valentinian dynasty

364 - 392 CE

The Valentinian dynasty sees a Tetrarchy-esque rule as Rome is purposely divided into Eastern and Western sections to be ruled by a pair of co-rulers. The decision fragments the empire forever.

Valentinian II
375 – 392 CE

The details surrounding the death of the final of the four Valentinian rulers, Valentinian II, remains a mystery, but many have theorised he was assassinated or committed suicide.

The Theodosian dynasty

379 - 457 CE

One of the last families to rule the empire in its twilight years. They initially rule in the Eastern Roman Empire, but come to briefly reunite the two sections under one family in 394 CE.

Honorius
395 – 423 CE

The Theodosian dynasty is the last Western family to rule the Eastern Roman Empire. From then on, the realm is ruled by the Byzantines.

Anthemius
467 – 472 CE

The last emperors of the Western Roman Empire

457 - 518 CE

As the Eastern Roman Empire (an entity that, in one form or another, endures until the 15th century under Eastern rulers) falls into Byzantine hands, the Western Roman Empire becomes a hodge podge of self-proclaimed emperors and assassinations. It is the great dream of Rome at its worst, the very fabric of Roman society coming apart at the seams as rich and powerful men with no mind to rule seek the hollow shell of Caesarhood. The Western Roman Empire doesn't go out with a blaze of glory, but peters out into nothing as the last of its claimants die or are murdered.

Julius Nepos
474 – 475 CE

We can see this as the effective end of the Western Roman Empire.

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Augustus

As the republic burned around him, one man would change Rome's fate forever

The battle was won. Mark Antony and Cleopatra retreated to Egypt, where they committed suicide. Lepidus (a general who had sided with Antony) was long gone. Rome still needed a leader, and there was only one candidate. Octavian was the undisputed ruler - he'd made sure of it.

But what do you do when your land is crumbling? The first thing is to eliminate any competition. Caesar's only biological son, Caesarion, was still alive and ruling over Egypt as Ptolemy XV Caesar. Not for long; his execution was ordered in 30 BCE. Now Octavian had a republic to rebuild.

Octavian knew exactly what he was doing. Roman politics were dangerous on a good day - Julius Caesar hadn't been the first to get himself killed - so care had to be taken. He had to restore the Roman Republic... or at least make it look like that's what he was doing. One person having all the power was never going to go over well; it stank of the old Roman kings who were only remembered for their corruption.

The plan worked. Octavian was named a consul when he re-entered Rome after the Battle of Actium. Bit by bit, he won over the Senate and began bringing stability back to the republic. His tenure as consul didn't end as he passed laws that seemed to reflect the old traditions. He undertook building projects to restore Rome to its former glory. He even named himself imperator (commander-in-chief). It was from this that the English language would later derive 'emperor'. At the time, he was perhaps better known as the princeps, or first citizen.

In 27 BCE, Octavian was bestowed a new name by the Senate: Augustus. He was rewarded for restoring the republic – something he definitely wasn't doing – and he would remain a consul for four more years. He initially turned down his new title, knowing full well the Senate would insist on giving him the honour. During the same year, he was also given a ten-year tenure of Spain, Gaul and Syria. With those regions came the majority of the army, and his power meant he could influence the appointments of the other provinces' proconsuls.

Augustus was loved by all and he continued to uphold republican values. Over time, while the facade slipped away, citizens and patricians either didn't notice or didn't care. In 19 BCE, Augustus was given supreme power of every Roman province; the empire was born.

The first emperor was given the power of a tribune for life, meaning he could now convene the Senate when he wanted to. But the role brought more clout with it than that; this position was usually annually elected and its holder considered the defender of the plebeians. August now had the lower classes on his side.

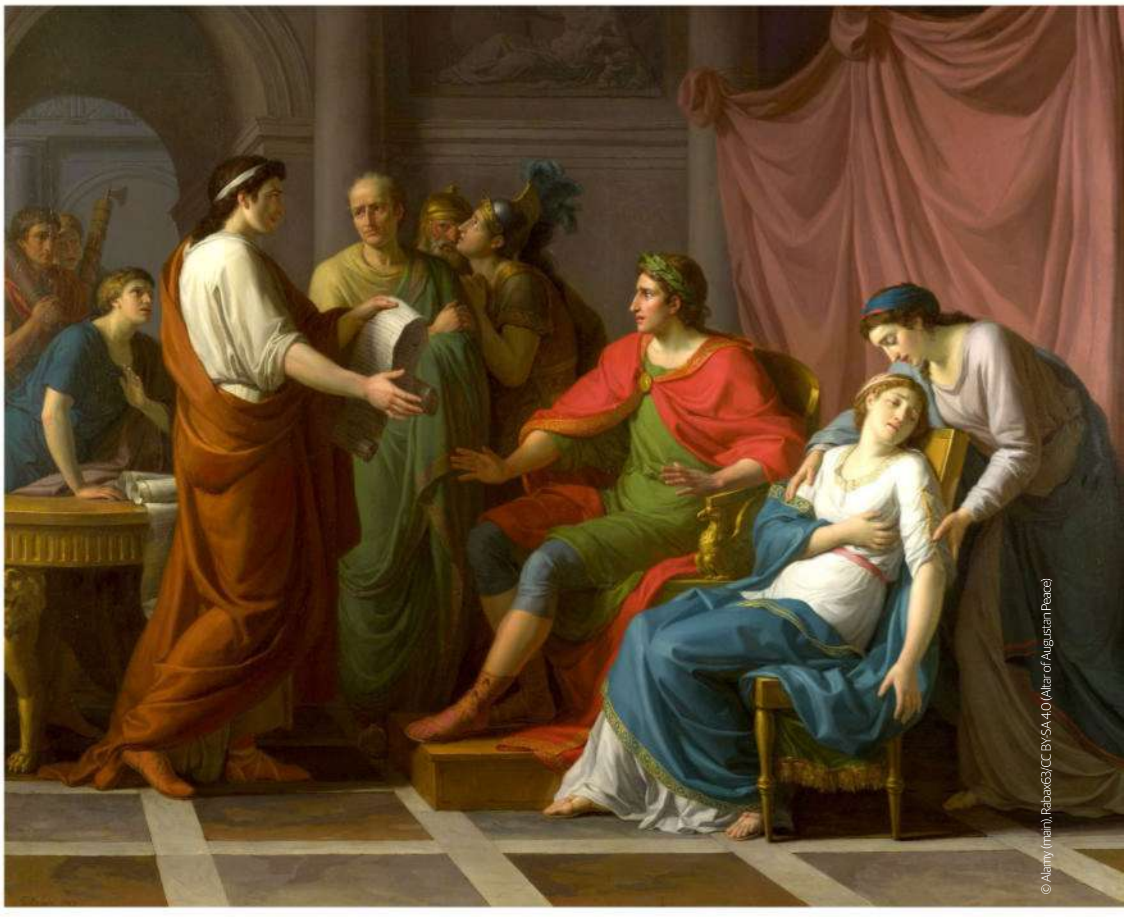
Keeping hold of an empire after such a turbulent time wasn't straightforward, but Augustus made it seem easy. Peace was restored and, unusually for Ancient Rome, maintained. That doesn't mean that there was no war (this was Rome, after all), but the infighting was halted. Pagan tribes in the Alps were attacked and Galatia in Asia Minor was annexed. Rome's boundaries were expanding, and they wouldn't begin to slow down until Emperor Trajan's death in 117 CE.

The arts flourished. The emperor was a patron to Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Livy and more, and he used literature to show his patriotic side. Virgil's *Aeneid* would paint Augustus as a direct descendant of Aeneas, a legendary founder of Rome whose mother was the goddess Aphrodite. His connections to the gods were boosted tenfold following the deification of Julius Caesar. Now he was the son of a god, too.

But if the republic was truly to be over, Augustus needed an heir. He couldn't live forever, although he did manage to rule for a good 40 years. But the succession was always going to be a problem – he only had a daughter, Julia. He looked to his nephew Marcellus, but he died in 23 BCE. Then he considered his grandsons Gaius and Lucius Caesar, adopting them as his own children and starting their political careers. They both died in the early 1st century CE. There were only two options left: his stepsons, Drusus and Tiberius. When Drusus died in 9 CE, only one man remained.

On Augustus' death in 14 CE, Rome wept. Tiberius ascended to the role of emperor and the line of Caesar was secure. It was official: Rome was no longer a republic. The first emperor allegedly claimed on his deathbed that he'd found Rome a city of clay and left it a city of marble, but he left behind more than that. He bequeathed to the world a legacy of a marble empire and the start of a new chapter of history.

"Over time, while the facade slipped away, citizens and patricians either didn't notice or didn't care"



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Caligula

Did the depraved Roman emperor, known for his horsing around, deserve the boot?

There were many megalomaniac rulers in the ancient world, but there was only one who allegedly tried to give his horse a political office. That honour is bestowed upon Gaius Julius Caesar Germanicus, better known today as Caligula, who was the third emperor of Rome from 37 to 41 CE.

Only on the throne for four years, it's a wonder he made a mark at all – nonetheless, his reputation precedes him. It's said that Caligula was insane and led a reign of terror before being assassinated, but is that a fair assessment?

Caligula wasn't always destined to rule. While he was descended from the great Augustus through his mother, his family fell from grace during Tiberius' reign. His mother and brothers were all accused of treason, dying in prison or exile. Caligula, meanwhile, was shielded by his grandmother until the death of Sejanus, Tiberius' lethal right-hand man, in 31 CE. A year later, Caligula had got back in Rome's good books and moved in with the aging emperor. He had even been named heir along with his cousin, Tiberius Gemellus, who was the emperor's natural grandson.

Little Bootikins

As a young child, Caligula accompanied his war-hero father, Germanicus, around the empire. He would often join his father as he inspected troops, and even wore a miniature centurion uniform, complete with little hobnail boots, or caligae. That was where his infamous nickname came from. Affectionately bestowed by his father's soldiers, it meant something like 'Little Boots' or 'Bootikins'. **14-16 CE**

It was here that Caligula was overindulged. Living on the sunny island of Capri just off the Bay of Naples, he got a taste for the excess that his guardian enjoyed. The Roman historian Suetonius wrote of their sadistic fun, going as far as saying that "even in those days Caligula could not control his natural brutality. He loved watching tortures and executions". But there's a very real problem with using Suetonius as an accurate source for Caligula. While he is known for his *Twelve Caesars*, a series of books about Rome's rulers from Julius Caesar to Domitian, these accounts were filled with gossip and hearsay. It also doesn't help that Suetonius was writing almost 100 years after Caligula's rule, during the reign of Hadrian.

The test of Caligula's character would come at the death of Tiberius in 37 CE. Now 25 years of age, Caligula was thrust into the spotlight as co-emperor with his cousin – until Gemellus' suspicious death. While some argue that Caligula had nothing to do with it, the opposition is much stronger. How could he not resist getting rid of the man who stood between him and total power of one of the greatest empires the Mediterranean had ever seen? Whatever happened, Caligula was now alone at the top.

At first, the people loved him. The murderous Tiberius hadn't exactly been popular, and a new, youthful emperor was a welcome change. He abolished the detested treason trials, recalled exiles and gave his Praetorian Guard – essentially the emperor's bodyguards – a nice bonus. He entertained the masses with gladiator matches and chariot races, rebuilt temples and spent huge amounts of money on new buildings. But then he took it a little too far when he requisitioned hundreds of merchant ships. Why?

> "How could he not resist getting rid of the man who stood between him and total power"

A new home

After years of being sheltered by his grandmother during his family's fall from grace, Caligula made his home on the island of Capri living with Emperor Tiberius. The ageing tyrant ruled Rome remotely from the pleasure palace of Villa Jovi ('Villa of Jupiter') in his final years, where he was said to also have indulged his most depraved vices, from debauched sexual acts to torturing his enemies. **31 CE**

To build a two-mile floating bridge across the Bay of Naples, and then gallop back and forth on it on his horse, of course. As a result, there were no boats left to transport grain into Rome, so the capital allegedly suffered a food shortage. While some historians think there's no way this can be true, there is archaeological evidence of pleasure barges built for Caligula. The boats were filled with marble decor, statues and mosaics, but their remains were unfortunately destroyed by fire during World War II.

Things only got worse. It was easy for everyone to see that Caligula was a bit unstable. Within six months of becoming emperor, he had suffered an illness that nearly took his life. Historians today are divided on the cause – it was perhaps epilepsy or maybe a breakdown – but most are able to agree on the outcome. Whatever happened to him during this period of sickness, it was his actions from this point on that would earn him his reputation as nothing short of a bloodthirsty madman.

Like any other Roman leader of the early empire, he led his troops in battle, this time heading for the Rhine and as far north as the English Channel. But Caligula didn't necessarily make them do any real fighting – according to Cassius Dio, he had the war trumpet sounded and then forced his soldiers to gather shells in their helmets. Not even the Romans could explain such bizarre behaviour.

Battle was a mainstay of Roman life, as each emperor would fight to attain glory, but it has been argued that Caligula led meaningless campaigns in Germany just to say that he'd won conflicts. He also continued the Roman policy of hostility and intolerance towards the Jewish population in Judaea, and things got worse for them when they refused to worship him as a living deity. Caligula reportedly ordered that a colossal statue of himself be put inside the Temple of Jerusalem, but he was fortunately talked down from the idea.

> "Whatever happened during this period of sickness, it was his actions from this point that would earn him his reputation as a bloodthirsty madman"

Just when you think the madness will finally stop, when you're sure that by now the powerful Roman Senate would have had enough of its problematic emperor, the troubles keep on coming. Perhaps the most famous story associated with the emperor regards his horse, Incitatus. That horse received things that many Roman citizens could only dream of – an ivory manger, a jewelled collar and even supposedly a house. Caligula was certainly a man of excess, and Incitatus was said to have been fed a mixture of rolled oats and gold flakes (which is probably untrue).

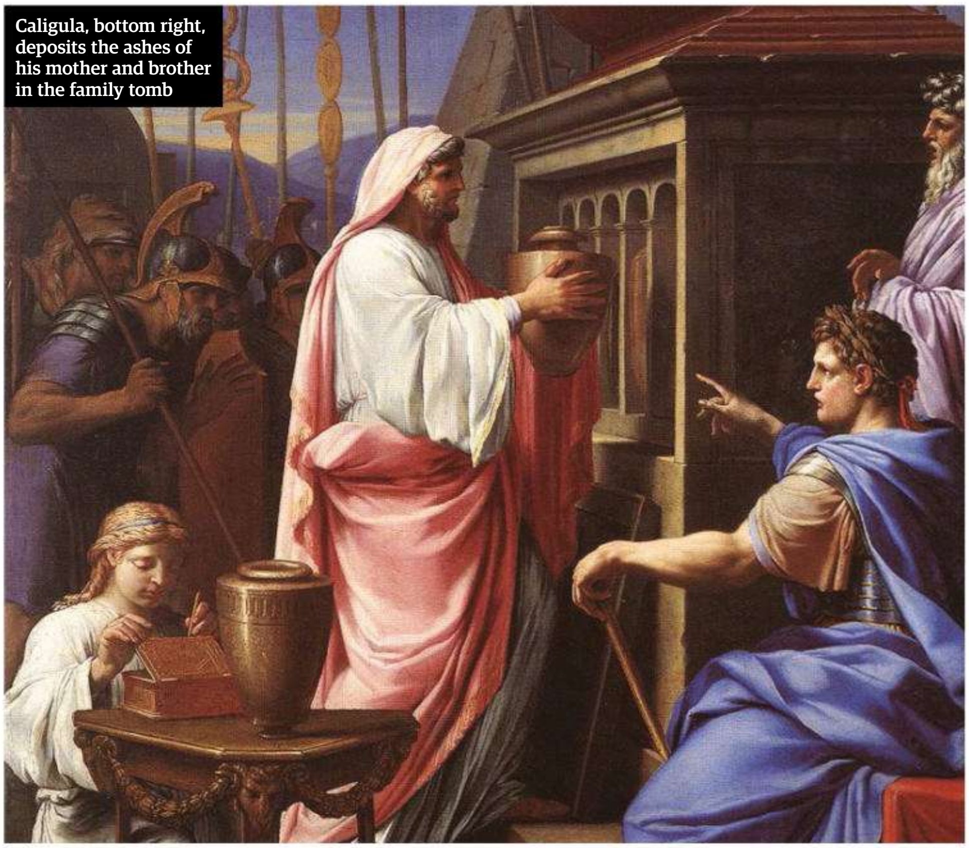
The legend goes that Caligula loved Incitatus so much that he decided to make his equestrian companion consul, an elected official just below the emperor. It was the epitome of insanity, arguably the main thing that comes to mind today when you mention Caligula's name – but it was probably a lie. This particular tale was put forward by Roman author Cassius Dio, who, like Suetonius, was writing years after the fact. Having said that, historian Aloys Winterling argued that if it did actually happen, it was because Caligula was mocking his Senate. In *Caligula: A Biography*, he puts forward the idea that the emperor was emphasising that a consul's job was so meaningless that even a horse could do it.

Herein lies the problem with studying Caligula, and many other Roman emperors: we can't back up some of the sources we have, especially those making salacious and outlandish claims. It also doesn't help that things like mental illness weren't necessarily recognised in the ancient world, and

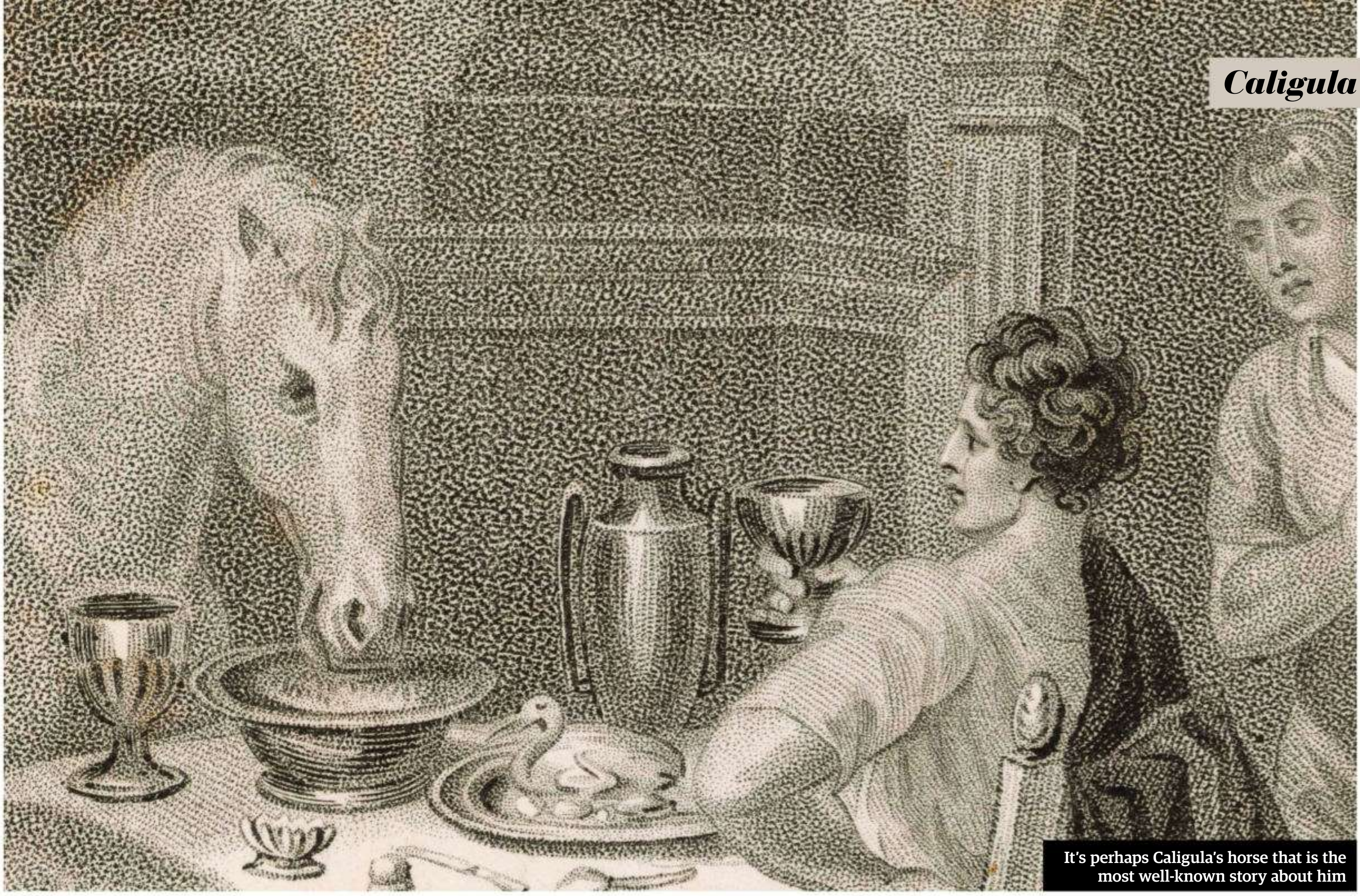
Off to a good start

The first six months or so of Caligula's rule were a welcome change from Tiberius' iron fist. As well as commissioning building projects and hosting great games to entertain the people, the young emperor also offered amnesty for exiles and abolished the hated treason trials. Things were looking promising for a flourishing Rome, but his almost limitless power soon went to the 24-year-old's head. **37 CE**

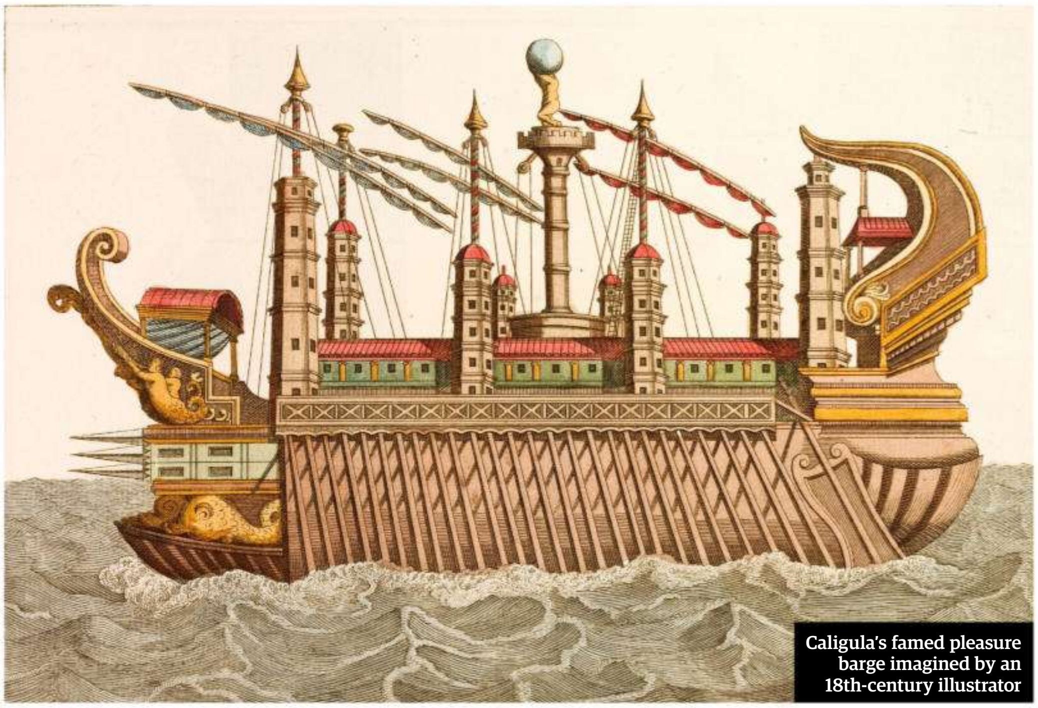
The emperor was said to have had an affair with his sister Drusilla



Caligula, bottom right, deposits the ashes of his mother and brother in the family tomb



It's perhaps Caligula's horse that is the most well-known story about him



Caligula's famed pleasure barge imagined by an 18th-century illustrator

certainly not seen as they are today. It's because of this that the argument of Caligula being mentally ill is relatively recent, and with today's mindset it's difficult to refute. After all, we can't help but view history through the lens of the time we're living in.

But something that we know for a fact is that Caligula was running out of money. Despite raising taxes again (this time on things like weddings and prostitutes), his treasury was being bled dry by his extravagance and building projects, and many people were starting to lose patience with their emperor. Plots and conspiracies popped up all over Rome, but the one that was successful was where no plot should have come from – his Praetorian Guard. The emperor's own bodyguards were the men who were ultimately successful in getting rid of him.

On 24 January 41 CE, Caligula was heading to have a quick bath to help get over a hangover. Down a back alley in the imperial compound in Rome, he was ambushed by a group of soldiers led by Cassius Chaerea, a soldier who had born the brunt of a fair few of Caligula's insults, and who had quite frankly had enough. He was the first Roman emperor to be assassinated, and that alone must prove his inability to rule, or at least that his people were unable to put up with his maniacal tendencies any longer. One family member who survived a quick purge of Caligula's relatives was invited to become emperor – cowering behind a curtain, it was Claudius who would come to rule next.

As we've seen, the way we view Caligula today has been undeniably shaped by historians who weren't around during his lifetime. These tales have been immortalised in books, films and plays. If you mention the emperor's name today, it conjures images of a madman with an unhealthy obsession with his horse.

While parts of these tales must be true (why else would he be murdered by those paid to protect him?), we can never know how far Caligula actually went and how much he was guided by mental instability from his period of illness. But salacious rumours tend to stick much better than the little truth we do know, so he'll be no doubt be referred to – in the words of Mary Beard – as a "template of tyranny" for a long time to come.

A brush with death

Things had been going so well for the young emperor – and then he became seriously ill. It's hard to tell what ailed him, but it's commonly thought that he had either an epileptic fit or a breakdown. Nonetheless, Caligula's attitude changed, and it began the downward spiral that would see him impose a reign of terror and ultimately result in his own brutal demise.

c.38 CE

© Alamy, Getty Images

Agrippina

The Most Extraordinary Woman of the Roman World

Agrippina the Younger is remembered as the tyrannical mother of Nero. It's time to re-evaluate her legacy

In 51 CE, Rome saw a sight it had never seen before. The sight came at the end of a grand parade through the streets of Rome designed to humiliate a captured enemy of the empire. The British rebel Caratacus had finally been caught and had been displayed with great pomp and circumstance to the Roman people and then, finally, he was to be presented at the feet of the emperor himself. But this time, for the first time in Rome's 800-year history as a kingdom, then a republic, then an imperial centre, a woman sat beside the emperor. Agrippina Augusta sat on a dais next to her husband, Claudius, with the standards of the Roman army swaying in the breeze behind her. She was the first and only woman to sit as the empress of Rome, as her husband's equal.

Julia Agrippina Augusta, more commonly remembered as Agrippina the Younger, was 36 years old on that day. She was twice widowed. She had been orphaned before she turned 16 and all five of her siblings had been murdered. Her third and final husband was the emperor Claudius and he was her father's older brother. Just a decade previously, Agrippina had been living in exile. Her life was a rollercoaster of highs and lows but, in 51 CE, it was at its height. Agrippina was ruling the empire, as she knew she deserved to.

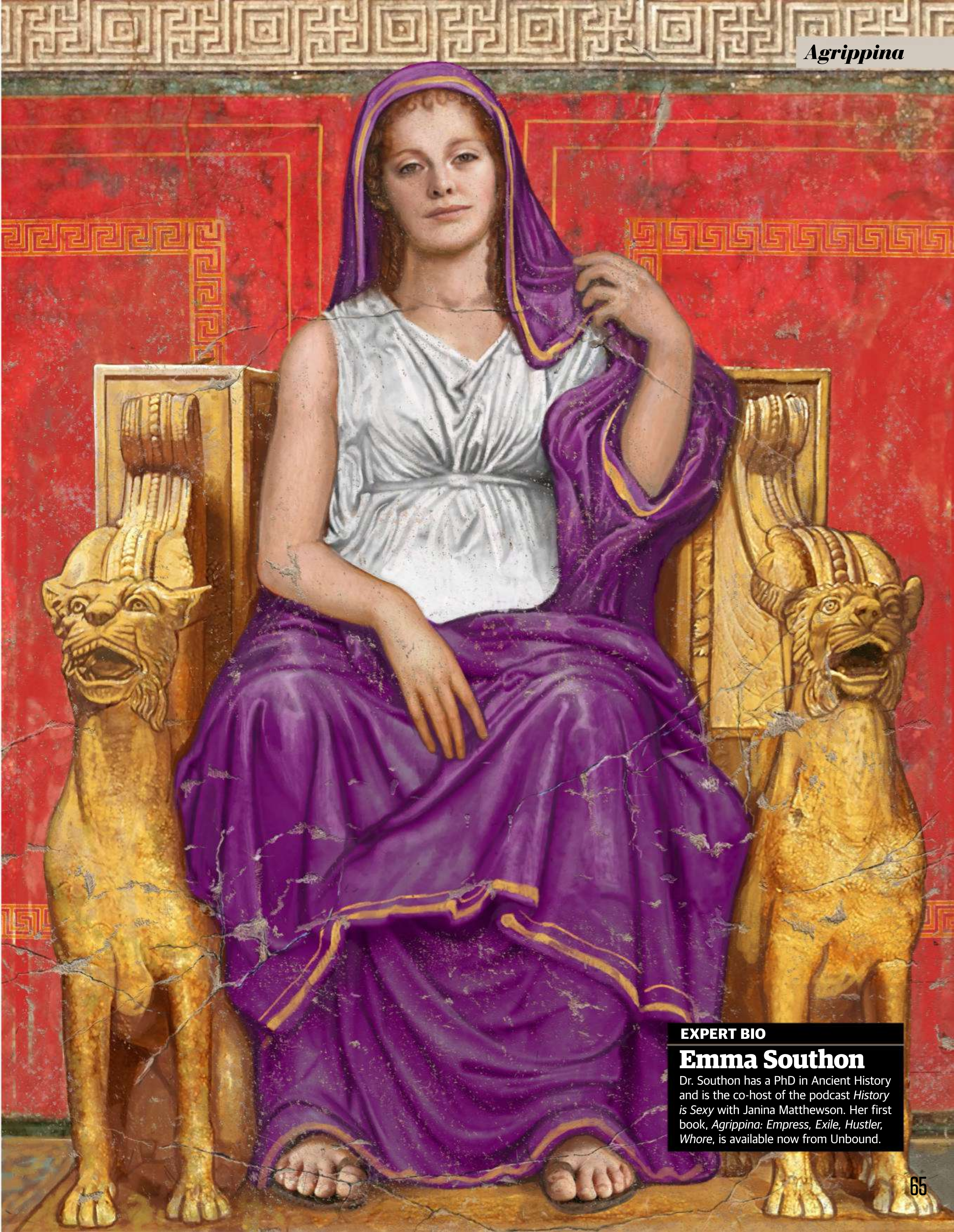
Agrippina was the daughter of Vipsania Agrippina and Germanicus, and claimed both the emperor Augustus as a great-grandparent through her mother and the ancient aristocratic lineage of the Claudian family through her father. Her parents were Rome's darlings, adored by everyone, and they fulfilled their promise by having six children. Agrippina seemed to be born into a charmed life, but her childhood turned out to be hard. Germanicus died, under mysterious circumstances, when Agrippina was a toddler. A decade later, after a long-running feud with the emperor Tiberius, her mother and two oldest brothers were exiled and then executed. At 13, Agrippina was married off to her cousin, the notoriously violent Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus, 20 years her senior. The early years of Agrippina's life were full of violence and pain and fear, but they forged her into a woman of incredible strength and ambition.

> "The early years of Agrippina's life were full of violence and pain and fear, but they forged her into a woman of incredible strength and ambition"

In 37 CE, when Agrippina was 22, her fortunes changed. Her great-uncle Tiberius died and her remaining brother, Gaius - better known as Caligula - became emperor. Agrippina knew safety for the first time in her life, and she celebrated by immediately becoming pregnant. She gave birth to her only child, Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus, ten months after Gaius ascended to the throne. During those ten months, she and her two sisters enjoyed unprecedented privilege and luxury. They were included in oaths of loyalty alongside their brother and were the first named women to ever appear on a Roman coin. Again, it seemed that Agrippina was settling in for a life of privilege and luxury as an imperial woman. Again, it wasn't to be. First, their middle sister Drusilla, died, sending Gaius into deep grieving. And then, Agrippina and her youngest sister, Livilla, were caught plotting against him.

The details of this plot are deeply obscure. Agrippina, Livilla and Drusilla's widower Lepidus (also Gaius's best friend) were tried, and humiliating love letters between Agrippina and Lepidus were read out in court. Whatever the details, it's apparent that a life of passive luxury did not satisfy Agrippina. She wanted more, and it could have killed her. Gaius was generous, though, and rather than execute them, he sent his sisters to exile on separate islands. Agrippina's punishment was to be condemned to a life of solitary boredom. As she arrived on the island of Ponza, Agrippina was facing decades of life in exile with her brother as emperor.

Fortune had other ideas. Just a year later, Gaius was assassinated and replaced by his doddering academic uncle Claudius. As all new emperors did, Claudius immediately reversed all his predecessors'



EXPERT BIO

Emma Southon

Dr. Southon has a PhD in Ancient History and is the co-host of the podcast *History is Sexy* with Janina Matthewson. Her first book, *Agrippina: Empress, Exile, Hustler, Whore*, is available now from Unbound.

Agrippina spawned one of the most evil of all the Roman emperors

> "Agrippina had travelled from princess, to exile, to minor royal, to the incestuous wife of the emperor, all by the age of 30"

policies, and that included pardoning political prisoners. Agrippina was allowed to return to Rome. She returned to a strange situation. Claudius was in his fifties and had been deliberately kept out of politics by Augustus and Tiberius. Gaius had brought him into political life but his experience was poor and the Senate had no respect for him. They had even less respect for his wife, Messalina, who was in her early twenties. Rome was in constant turmoil, with regular treason trials and occasional rebellions. Claudius responded with frequent executions.

Agrippina's response was to keep herself safe. Her son was the only living male descendant of the Divine Augustus and she was the sole remaining child of the adored Germanicus. They were a powerful threat to the emperor and his own son, who were from the lesser side of the Julio-Claudian family. So, Agrippina stayed away from Rome for five years. She re-appeared only when Messalina signed her own death warrant by bizarrely getting married to someone else while Claudius was on a day-trip. Messalina was executed within hours.

Weeks after Messalina's execution, Agrippina burst back into the spotlight when it was announced that the laws concerning incest were being changed so that Claudius could marry her. He was also going to adopt her son, changing his name to Nero, and betrothe his new son to his daughter Octavia. Agrippina had travelled from princess, to exile, to minor royal, to the incestuous wife of the emperor, all by the age of 30.

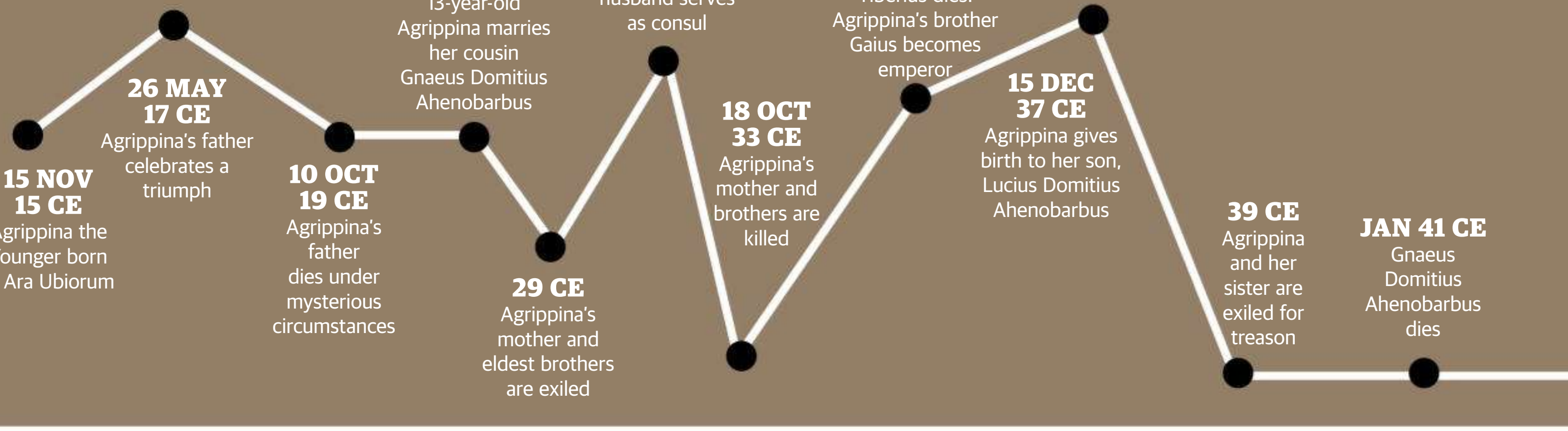
For most women in the Roman world, a world in which women were considered to be perpetual minors and were not legally allowed to even sign contacts, this would be the height of their ambition. To be the wife of a powerful and aristocratic man and to have a clear pathway to power for their children was the very best that a woman could hope for. Agrippina was different to other Roman women. She was not content with the impotent influence that was a perk of being the emperor's wife. She wanted real power. She wanted to rule.

Agrippina got lucky with her husband. Claudius was bad at politics and bad at ruling, and he was happy to accept help, even from his wife. Agrippina stabilised his reign and the executions and rebellions almost immediately ceased. Within a year, she had taken the honorific Augusta, making her Claudius's equal in name. She celebrated by founding a city in the place of her birth. We now know it as Cologne.

Agrippina became intimately involved in the running and administering of the empire. She was her husband's partner in rule in every way. She broke every rule of appropriate female behaviour by refusing to be a quiet, passive wife. In 52 CE, she caused an immense stir by appearing at a spectacular event, the draining of the Fucine Lake, in a man's military cloak made of gold thread. She glittered and dazzled the crowds of spectators and appalled them. In the same year, she sat in state

The rise and fall of an empress

Agrippina's ups and downs



15 NOV 15 CE
Agrippina the Younger born in Ara Ubiorum

26 MAY 17 CE
Agrippina's father celebrates a triumph

10 OCT 19 CE
Agrippina's father dies under mysterious circumstances

28 CE
13-year-old Agrippina marries her cousin Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus

29 CE
Agrippina's mother and eldest brothers are exiled

32 CE
Agrippina's husband serves as consul

18 OCT 33 CE
Agrippina's mother and brothers are killed

16 MARCH 37 CE
Tiberius dies. Agrippina's brother Gaius becomes emperor

15 DEC 37 CE
Agrippina gives birth to her son, Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus

39 CE
Agrippina and her sister are exiled for treason

JAN 41 CE
Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus dies

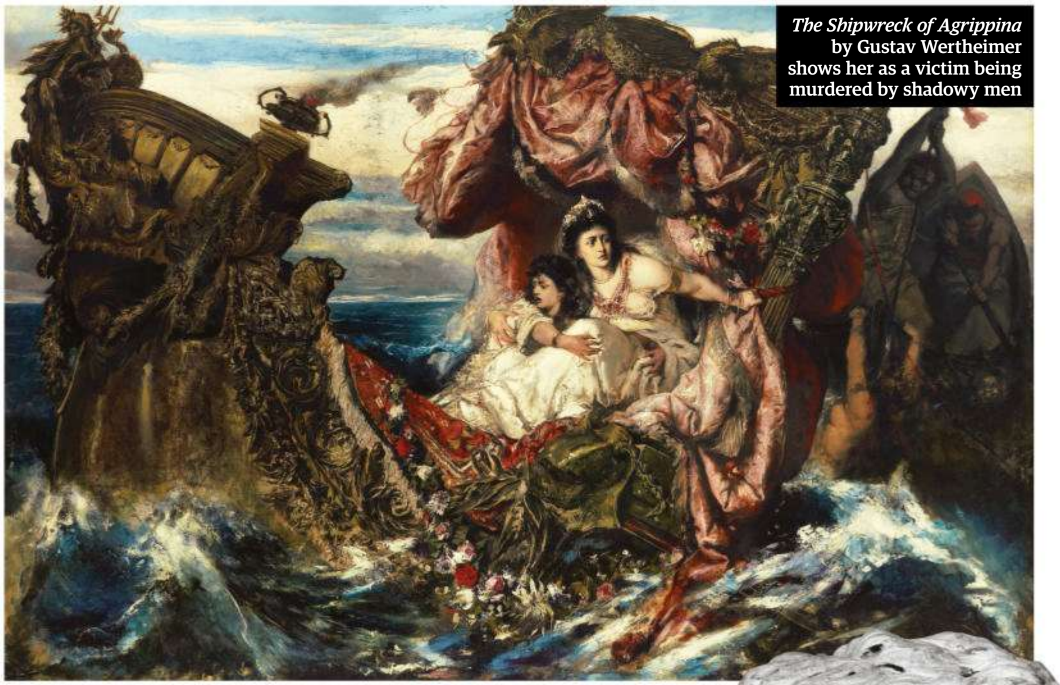
to receive the captured British rebel Caractacus alongside Claudius. She was a clear, public presence and a part of the Roman state. She even appeared on her husband's coinage, her face overlaid by his. She was everything a Roman woman was not supposed to be.

This is one reason why she appears in the Roman sources as a monster. She was a woman who dared to speak and act in public, and she did it well. A good Roman woman was silent, modest, fertile and domestic. Agrippina was none of these things. She did not act like a good woman should act, and so she was a villain.

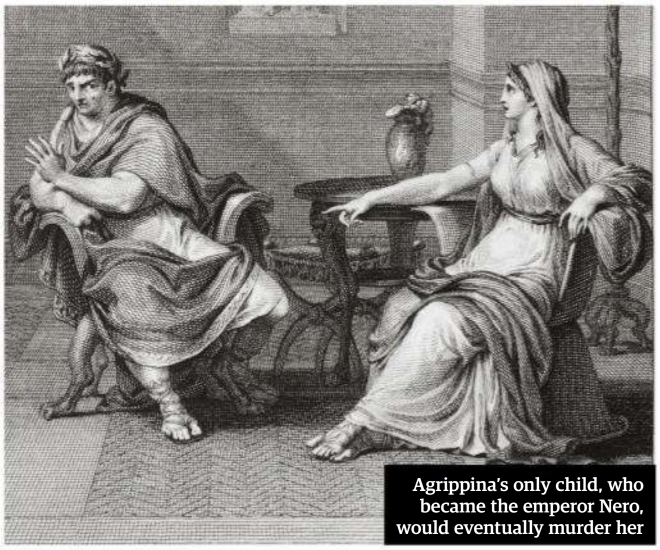
There is, however, a second reason that Agrippina is remembered as a monster. Agrippina's greatest ambition was to have her son, now called Nero, succeed her husband as emperor. After five years of ruling alongside Claudius, his biological son, Britannicus, was about to come of age and enter public life, threatening Nero's succession. Although Nero was just 19, Agrippina took a risk. She murdered her husband. Although there are multiple versions of how Claudius died, and the wife wielding poison is a classic trope of Roman literature, sources are unanimous that Agrippina killed her husband to save her son's career.

This murder was monstrous in itself, and it ushered in a monstrous age. Nero's reign lasted for almost 14 years and they were remembered by those who survived them and those who heard about them from their parents as a time of unparalleled horrors. Nero was capricious, cruel and tyrannical. He ran the Roman Empire as his personal theatre troupe, and murdered everyone who upset him, starting with his own family. Nero became emperor because Agrippina made it so. For many, she was as much to blame for the crimes of his reign as the emperor himself.

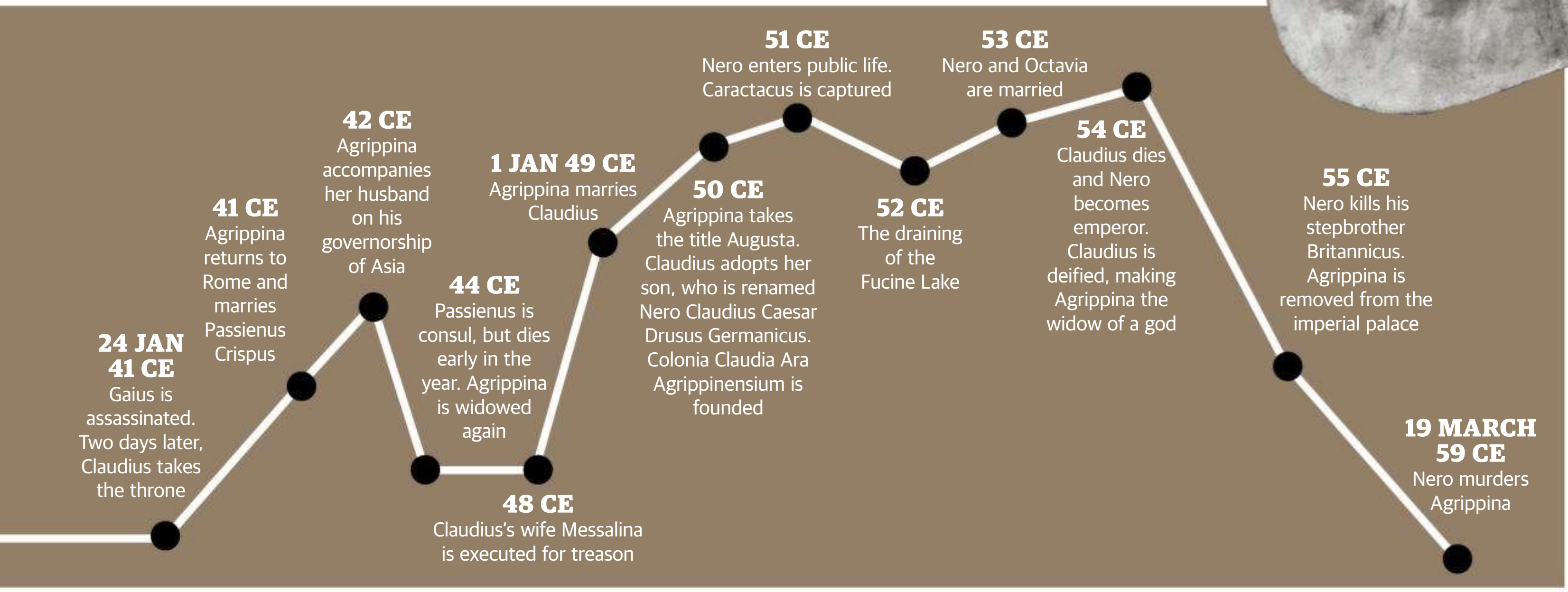
Agrippina, however, could not have predicted how Nero's reign would turn out. It certainly was not how she planned. When the teenage emperor took the throne, Agrippina assumed that she would



The Shipwreck of Agrippina **by Gustav Wertheimer shows her as a victim being murdered by shadowy men**



Agrippina's only child, who became the emperor Nero, would eventually murder her



24 JAN 41 CE
Gaius is assassinated. Two days later, Claudius takes the throne

41 CE
Agrippina returns to Rome and marries Passienus Crispus

42 CE
Agrippina accompanies her husband on his governorship of Asia

44 CE
Passienus is consul, but dies early in the year. Agrippina is widowed again

48 CE
Claudius's wife Messalina is executed for treason

1 JAN 49 CE
Agrippina marries Claudius

50 CE
Agrippina takes the title Augusta. Claudius adopts her son, who is renamed Nero Claudius Caesar Drusus Germanicus. Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium is founded

51 CE
Nero enters public life. Caractacus is captured

52 CE
The draining of the Fucine Lake

53 CE
Nero and Octavia are married

54 CE
Claudius dies and Nero becomes emperor. Claudius is deified, making Agrippina the widow of a god

55 CE
Nero kills his stepbrother Britannicus. Agrippina is removed from the imperial palace

19 MARCH 59 CE
Nero murders Agrippina

be regent, and, for the first few months, that's how it seemed to go. In Aphrodisias in Turkey, there survives an extraordinary sculpture depicting Agrippina dressed as the goddess Roma placing a crown upon Nero's head. She holds the power of the empire, and she grants it to her son. This was the pinnacle of Agrippina's status; she seemed to have transcended the limits placed upon her as a result of her gender and attained true power. It was an illusion, and it did not last.

It took only a few months for Nero to realise that his imperial power had no limits and that he did not have to be beholden to his mother. She had granted him the empire, but now the empire was his. She thought she had given him a gift he would freely share with her. What she had really given him was a weapon he could wield against everyone, including her. He was supported in this conclusion by his tutor, the Stoic philosopher and playwright Seneca, who actively opposed the participation of women in politics. Despite owing Agrippina his life and career, Seneca worked with Nero to remove Agrippina from all public and political spaces and, in doing so, he exposed how unprotected she was as a woman.

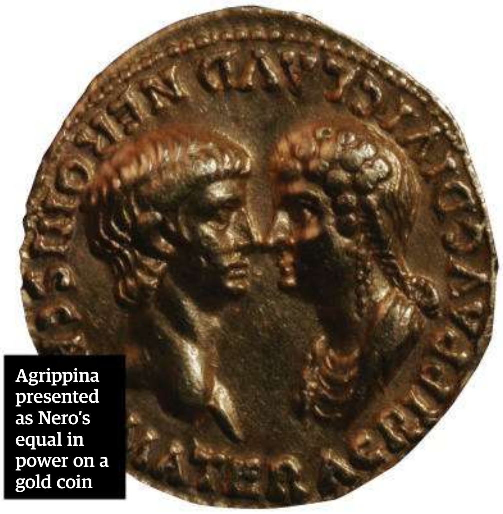
The first crisis for Agrippina's power occurred when a delegation from the troubled province of Armenia came to Rome. Nero received them formally, and Agrippina arrived at the reception expecting the same treatment her husband had given her. She stepped onto the imperial dais to take her seat as the emperor's equal. Seneca and Nero acted swiftly. Nero kissed his mother and then firmly guided her off the dais and out of the room. He humiliated her and destroyed her fragile appearance of power in just a few seconds.

For five years, their relationship continued to deteriorate. There were frequent arguments and threats, and Agrippina's role became less and less public. Although she was still a presence in Nero's reign, she vanishes from the sources, but the empire continued to run smoothly, despite Nero's lack of interest or ability. These years are the most difficult for biographers of Agrippina, but it appears that during this time she wrote her autobiography; the only woman in Roman history to have done so. Our main evidence that she was still an active participant in running the empire is that, in 59 CE, Nero decided to kill his mother. It was not easy. Attempts to poison her were thwarted by her habit of taking antidotes and the loyalty of her household. Attempts to stab her were undermined by her popularity with the army and people of Rome and the fear that an overt assassination would end in a revolt.

Eventually, Nero resorted to the bizarre theatrics of a collapsing boat to disguise her death as an accident. He was, apparently, unaware that she was a strong swimmer and she survived this too. In terror and despair, and concerned Agrippina would turn the army against him, Nero persuaded a loyal ally to butcher her in her own house. At the age of just 43, Agrippina died in her bedroom, rebellious and furious to the last moment, directing her murderers where to stab her, demanding to be stabbed in her womb. She was buried in an unmarked grave outside of Rome and for years Nero refused to mention her. She was denied the public funeral and honours she deserved. This matricide was seen as one of the greatest crimes of Nero's reign.

> "She tried to transcend the legal and social limits that were placed on her in Rome because of her gender"

Agrippina's life was one of extraordinary lows and exceptional highs. More than any other woman in Roman history, she tried to transcend the legal and social limits that were placed on her in Rome because of her gender. She refused to be put into the easy boxes of wife and mother and instead created the role of Augusta, a partner in the empire. She created her own path, which took her to ruling Rome peacefully for almost a decade and which placed Nero, the destruction of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, on the throne. She was a diplomat and a murderer. She was the sister, niece, wife and mother of emperors. She was an exile and an empress. She was the most extraordinary woman that Rome ever saw.



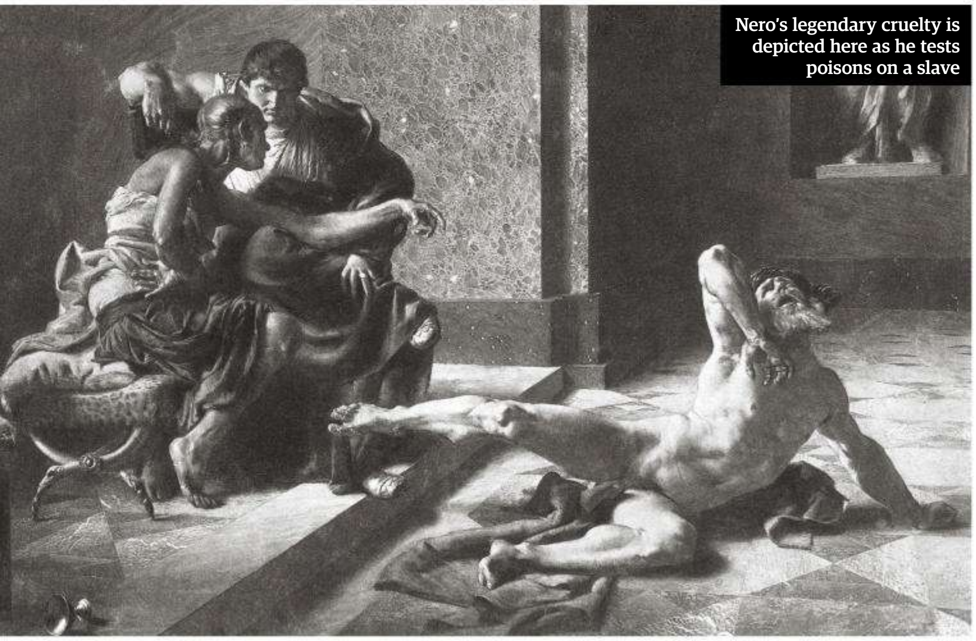
Agrippina presented as Nero's equal in power on a gold coin

The Mother of Cologne

The city founded by Agrippina

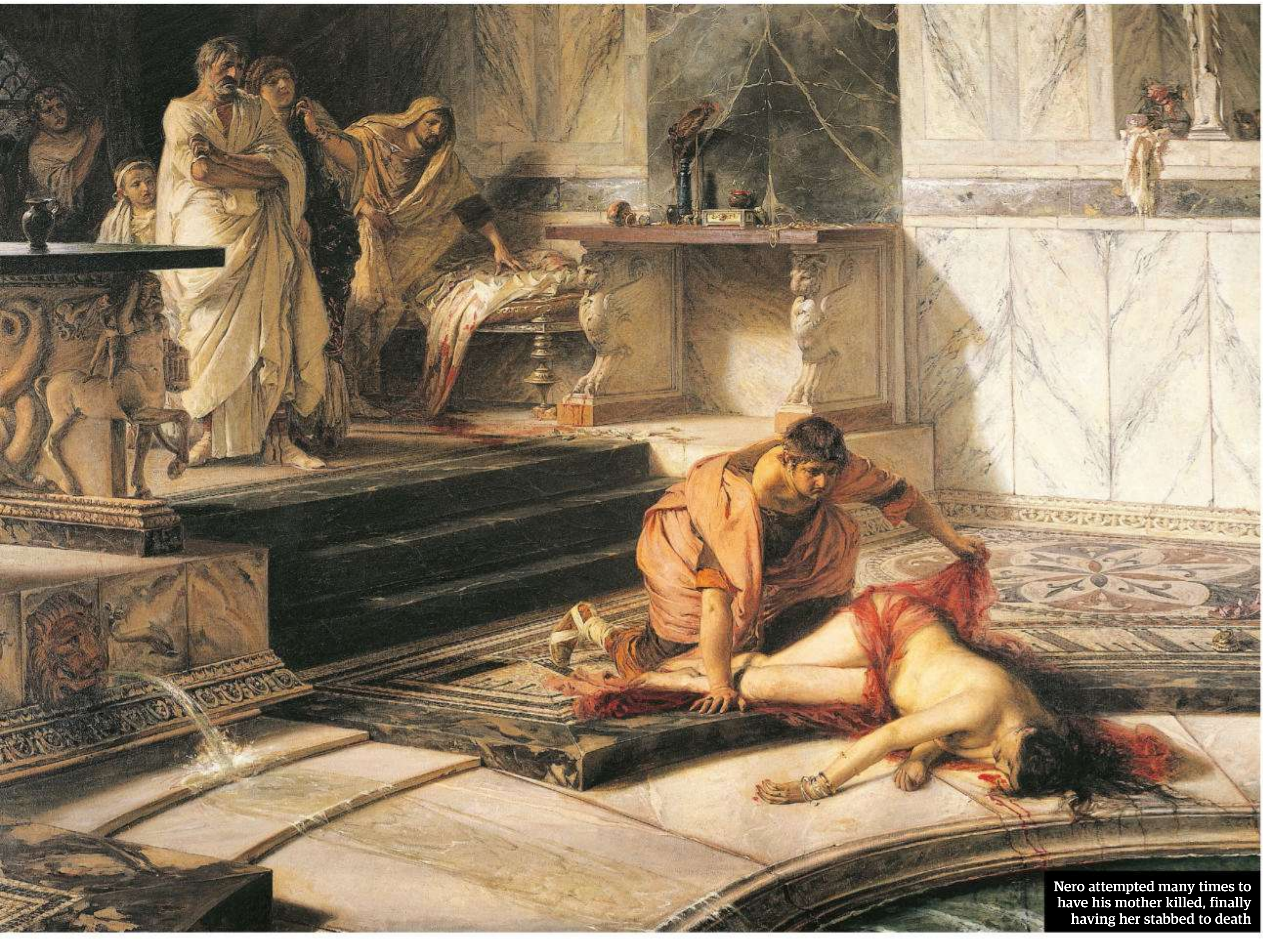
Colonia Claudius Ara Agrippinensium was founded in 50 CE on the banks of the Rhine, upgrading a town named Oppidum Ubiorum where Agrippina was born to the status of Roman colony. It was known colloquially as Colonia Agrippinensis – the Agrippinian Colony – and, over time, this was shortened to simply the Colony. The city still holds a version of this name today, called Köln in German and Cologne in English.

The city was a beacon of Roman culture in the area, populated by retired Roman soldiers and Germanic Roman allies. The upgrade to colony status meant that new temples to the Capitoline Trio and to the imperial cult were built, as well as thermae, protective walls and a theatre: the foundations of Roman culture. Cologne became an international centre for artisanal glass production and developed its own intricate, signature style of glass decoration called snake-thread. Today, Agrippina is still remembered as the Mother of the City and The Maiden in the annual carnival parade where she is played each year by a man in 'Roman' dress.



Nero's legendary cruelty is depicted here as he tests poisons on a slave

Agrippina, dressed as the goddess Roma, crowns her son Nero



Nero attempted many times to have his mother killed, finally having her stabbed to death

© Getty, Alamy.

Nero

He slaughtered Christians, murdered his loved ones and possibly set Rome ablaze, but who was the real man behind the myth of the monstrous Emperor Nero?

Emperor Nero was going to die. The Senate had ordered his death, and the last remnant of control he had was to claim his death himself. Nero paced back and forth muttering the same words over and over again: "What an artist dies in me."

All his friends had abandoned him, and his own dark acts had led him to this moment, but still he refused to acknowledge it. He wasn't a ruthless killer, he was just misunderstood - an artist. What a pity for the world to lose such a remarkable artist. In the distance, he heard the rumble of hooves: they were coming for his blood, but he would not give it to them. They had called him greedy, frivolous, self-indulgent, and now he would be - his blood was his own, not the Senate's or the usurper's, and blood was all Nero had left.

When Nero was born on 15 December 37 CE, the Julio-Claudian dynasty had been ruling the Roman Empire for more than 50 years. This line, through adoption, could be traced back to the famed and celebrated Julius Caesar himself. Since his death, the man had taken on an almost god-like status, and those 'descended' from him were the only ones deemed worthy to rule the nation he had forged.

Originally born as Lucius Domitius Ahenbarbus, some believe Nero was doomed to his later barbaric nature due to his parentage. His father, Gnaeus, was known as a dangerous and violent man who had been charged with treason, adultery and incest. It is said that when he was congratulated on the birth of his son, he proclaimed that anything born to him and his wife would be a "disaster".

Gnaeus was dead before Nero would even remember him. Instead, it would be his mother who would play the most influential role in his life, and Gnaeus was right to doubt the purity of his wife. Agrippina was a woman forged in fire - she had lived to see her mother, Agrippina the Elder, and two of her brothers arrested, exiled and starved to death; she had been forced to marry a detestable man she loathed and she had been exiled by her own brother, Caligula.

It is no wonder that Agrippina had been forced to turn herself into steel to survive; she was done being passed around like a chess piece - she wanted control, and it started with marrying the emperor Claudius. Agrippina was a sly woman, well versed in the subtleties of the Roman court, and by using her web of political alliances, she found herself married to Claudius - despite the fact he was her uncle.

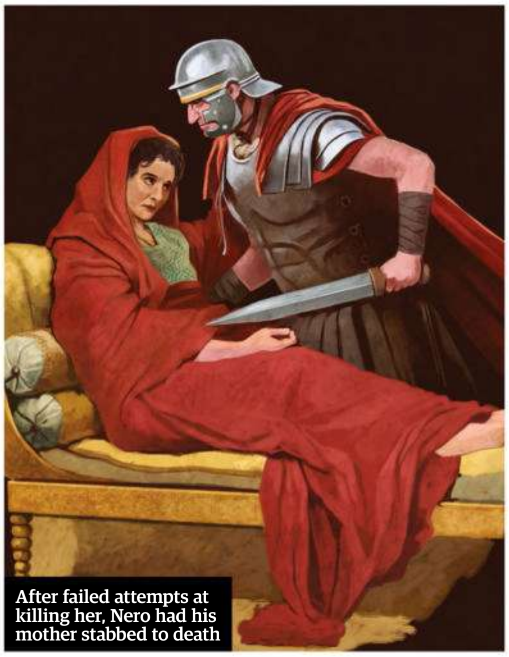
Although Claudius had his own son, Britannicus, he was still young in a society with high mortality rates, so 13-year-old Nero was swiftly made his heir. Agrippina couldn't be emperor herself; she was, after all, a woman. But she could control it so that her own son sat on the throne, and he was just an inexperienced youth who would easily bend to her will. To further solidify her son's position, she had him married to Octavia, Claudius' daughter.

However, it wasn't long after this that Claudius began to waver; he seemed to regret marrying Nero to his daughter and started to focus more on his own son, preparing him for the imperial throne. To regain control, Agrippina needed to act

quickly. Ancient sources state that she poisoned her husband with a plate of mushrooms, while others suspect that Agrippina actually had nothing to do with Claudius' death. However, considering the timing of the emperor's demise, a natural death seems an all-too-convenient explanation.

In 54 CE, before he could officially re-instate his own son as heir, Claudius passed away and the position of emperor fell to Nero. It is unknown if Nero played a part in the poisoning, or even if he was privy to the details, but it is peculiar that from then on, Nero proclaimed mushrooms to be "the food of the gods".

To the public, Nero was a welcome change. In fact, the early part of his reign was hailed as a golden age. Nero was obsessed with personal popularity – more than anything, he wanted to be liked. In his early years he abolished capital punishment, lowered taxes, gave more rights to slaves and gave aid to other cities. He loved the arts and he put on lavish games, concerts, chariot races and tournaments. To the people, it seemed that he was genuinely interested in being a good ruler, but it is likely he was still worried about the ever-looming threat of Claudius's true son claiming the throne. If the people liked him, then it was less likely they would support his rival. To Nero, popularity meant power.


After failed attempts at killing her, Nero had his mother stabbed to death

However, things at home were less than stable. Nero was only 17 when he became emperor, making him the youngest ever to assume the throne up until that point. His ascension not only transformed him into an emperor, but also into a man. While his mother's scheming and influence had been useful in the struggle for succession, now he was ruler he had his own ambitions, many of which did not involve her. Having a mother figure so strong and domineering was frustrating to the ambitious young man, and, much to his mother's annoyance, he began to rely more on the guidance of his advisors. His advisors' opinions were clear – Agrippina wasn't to be trusted.

Agrippina's influence can be seen from this coin that features her image alongside her son – a very rare occurrence

With the relationship souring, Nero purposely began to act out. He had long loathed the political marriage he had been forced into with Octavia and instead began an affair with a former slave. When his outraged mother found out and demanded he rid himself of her, Nero instead began living with her as his wife. It was a very unsubtle message – Nero wasn't a child anymore, and his mother didn't control him. Nero swiftly moved Agrippina out of the palace, denied her the protection of the Praetorian Guard and banned her from the gladiatorial contests.

Agrippina, however, wasn't one to go down quietly. Finally realising that she had completely lost grip on a son who had inherited her own ruthless ambition, she turned her attention elsewhere, to the one other person who could claim the throne and reinstate her power – Britannicus. He was still a minor, but suddenly, in 55 CE, the day before he was due to be declared an adult, Claudius' true son died while at a banquet. Agrippina had taught her son two things: how to succeed, and how to kill – and now he was a master of both.

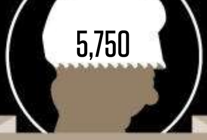
In 58 CE, Nero finally decided he was finished with his loveless marriage and declared his wish to marry another – Poppaea Sabina. However, his mother refused to stay quiet and she let her opposition to the divorce be heard clearly among the Roman population, who also did not wish Nero to divorce Octavia. Feeling his support waning and finally pushed to breaking point, Nero made a decision – it was time to rid himself of his interfering mother once and for all.

Nero's decision to kill his mother was not a sudden, rash one. It was thought out and planned down to the last detail. At first he had experts craft a device that could be affixed to her ceiling and would then crush her in her sleep. When that proved too complicated, he opted for a boat made to sink. However, Agrippina escaped by swimming to shore. Finally, out of options, he returned to tradition and had her stabbed to death.

Shortly after Agrippina's murder, Nero began to change. Perhaps it was something to do with murdering his own mother that haunted his mind. Whether it was guilt or something animal within him being unleashed, the kind, fair ruler that the people loved seemed to vanish almost overnight.

5 most murderous emperors

The men who ruled Rome with fear, blood and death

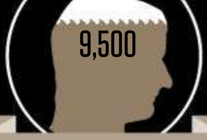


NERO

B.15 DEC 37 CE – D.9 JUN 68 CE

♛ 13 OCT 54 CE – 9 JUN 68 CE

Nero's tyrannical reputation is well earned – not only did he direct his murderous intents towards innocent Christians, beginning a tradition of torture and persecution that would last hundreds of years, but he also killed those closest to him.

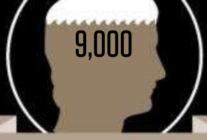


TIBERIUS

B.16 NOV 42 BCE – D.16 MAR 37 CE

♛ 18 SEP 14 CE – 16 MAR 37 CE

Accounts of Tiberius' murderous streak differ – some sources claim only four innocents died under his reign. However, others paint the picture of a ruthless emperor, killing anyone he suspected of plotting against him, leaving heaps of dead bodies in his wake.

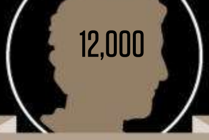


CALIGULA

B.31 AUG 12 CE – D.24 JAN 41 CE

♛ 18 MAR 37 CE – 24 JAN 41 CE

Death surrounded Caligula from an early age, with almost his entire family destroyed by Tiberius. Caligula was known to have an insatiable lust for power. Although we cannot verify them, there are many outrageous stories of murder and tyranny.

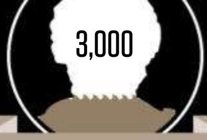


COMMODUS

B.31 AUG 161 – D.31 DEC 192

♛ 177 – 31 DEC 192

Rather than being a ruthless tyrant, Commodus is often painted as a figure of cowardice, easily influenced by men with dark intentions. It was repeated attempts upon his life that pushed the emperor to kill for almost no reason at all.

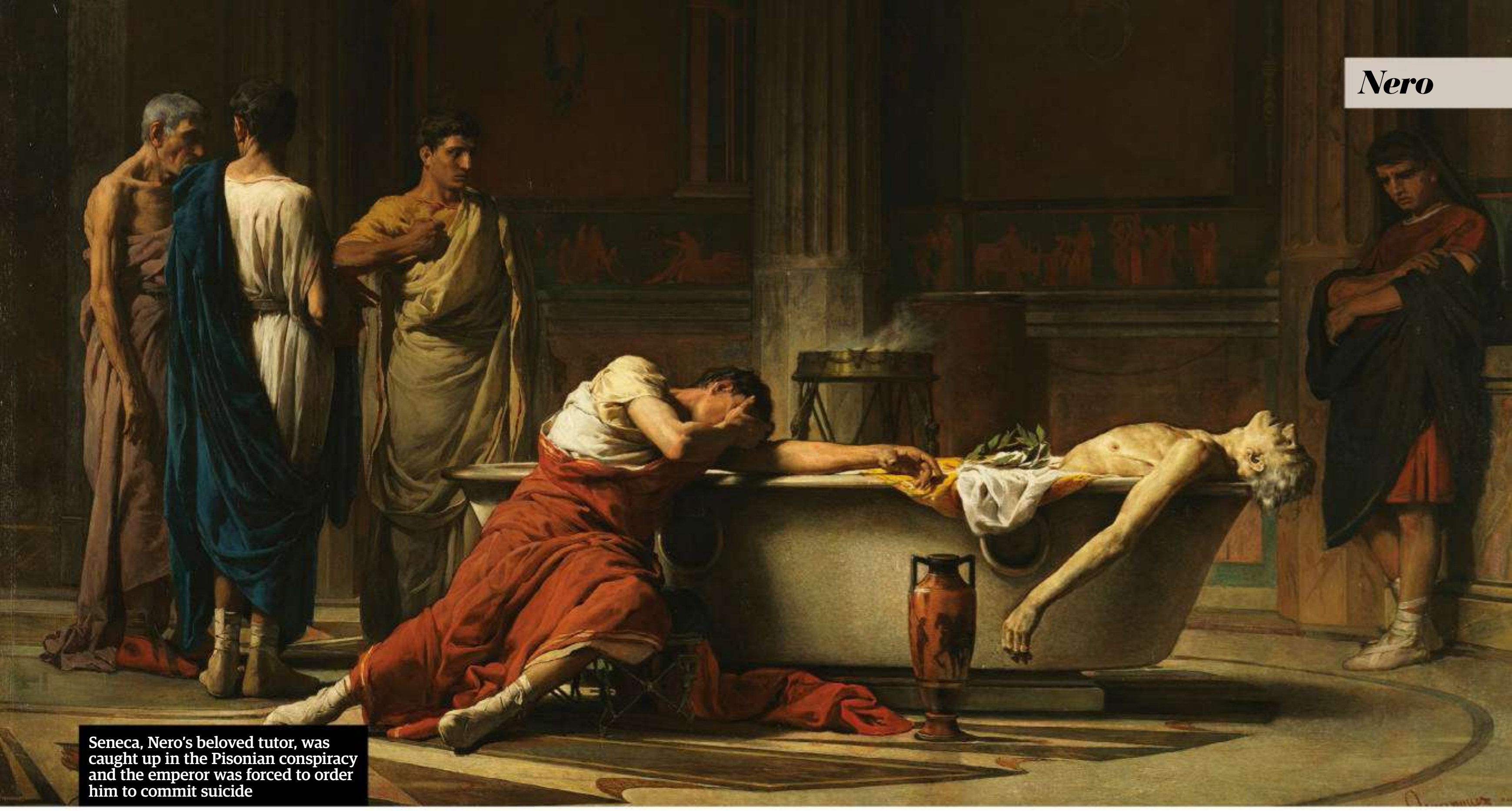


SEVERUS

B.11 APR 145 – D.4 FEB 211

♛ 14 APR 193 – 4 FEB 211

Severus claimed the throne through bloody means, deposing the previous emperor and waging war on his rivals. Soon his cruelty became renowned and he earned himself the nickname 'the Punic Sulla' in reference to the infamous dictator Sulla.



Seneca, Nero's beloved tutor, was caught up in the Pisonian conspiracy and the emperor was forced to order him to commit suicide

"The same man who had abolished capital punishment began executing anyone who he suspected of conspiring against him"

Nero had always been self-indulgent, but his hedonistic lifestyle became so over the top that it began to sicken the very people who had once loved him.

He spent an outrageous amount of money on himself and his artistic pursuits, and he began to give public performances, an action criticised as shameful by many ancient historians. He forbade anyone from leaving while he performed, and some likely inflated accounts write of women giving birth in the arena and men flinging themselves off the high walls to escape the boredom. If Nero had simply been a hedonistic ruler, that would not have been so terrible; he had always been lavish and craved the people's attention. Now he was cruel, too. This cruelty was directed at the woman he likely viewed as the last thorn in his side – his wife.

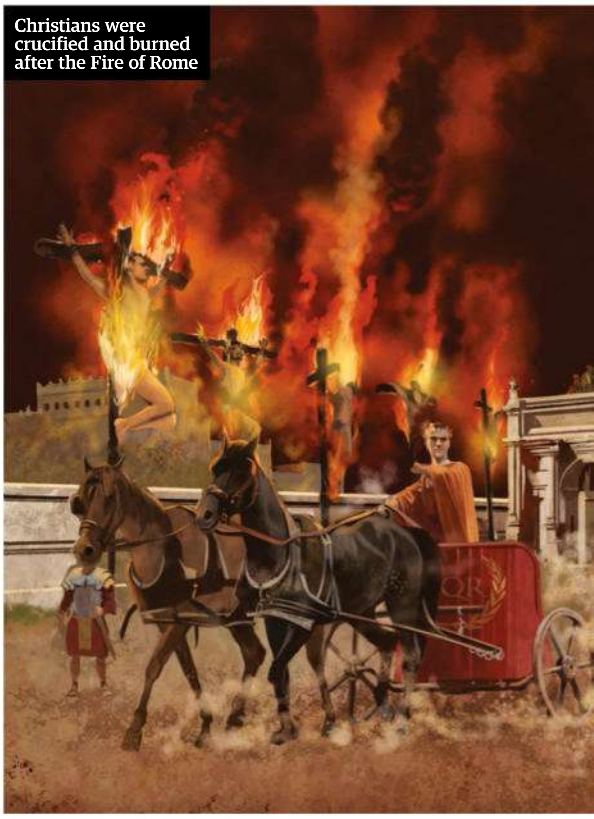
With nobody to oppose him, Nero divorced the nation's darling, Octavia, and banished her on grounds of infertility. This left him free to marry Poppaea, by that point heavily pregnant. Eventually Nero bowed to public protests and let Octavia return, but not for long. Officially her death was deemed a suicide, but the truth was a badly kept secret: Nero had ordered her execution. Her popularity was turning the public against him, therefore she had to be eliminated. As the people wept, the emperor had her head sent to his new wife as a gift.

The people of Rome were not idiots, and the sudden death of Octavia and swift remarriage had made many people suspect Nero's hidden murderous ways. Accusations of treason against the emperor began to emerge, but rather than heed this warning and lay low, he instead became more vicious than ever.

The same man who had abolished capital punishment began executing anyone who he suspected of conspiring against him. Eventually this cull extended to people who said any bad word about him; one commander was even executed for making a negative comment at a party. It is said that Nero was haunted by memories of his mother and wife, and the guilt transformed him into a bloodthirsty animal, killing without moderation or consideration. Although his murderous actions could be chalked up to rage and suspicion, it did mean one thing: Nero's rivals were eliminated.

Nero seemed to have decided that if he couldn't have power by popularity, then he would have power by dominance. Over this period, he slowly usurped authority from the Senate. Just ten years after promising senators power equivalent to that they had held under the republic, Nero had all but stripped them of their worth. To the emperor, this meant more power for him, but the Senate was also full of dangerous, ambitious men, and ignoring them would later prove his downfall.

In 64 CE, something even more devastating than Nero's rage distracted the Roman public. A great fire consumed the city, destroying three districts, damaging seven and leaving thousands of citizens homeless. Accidental fires were not uncommon at the time, but a rumour soon sprung up that it was Nero himself who had started it in order to clear space for his new luxury complex, the Domus Aurea, or Golden House. Although it is impossible to confirm who ignited the fire, the fact that his subjects all believed Nero capable of starting it to benefit himself is indicative of how far the beloved emperor had fallen. Nero was quick to shift the blame, pointing the fingers at Christians, and in doing so began years of torture and persecution.



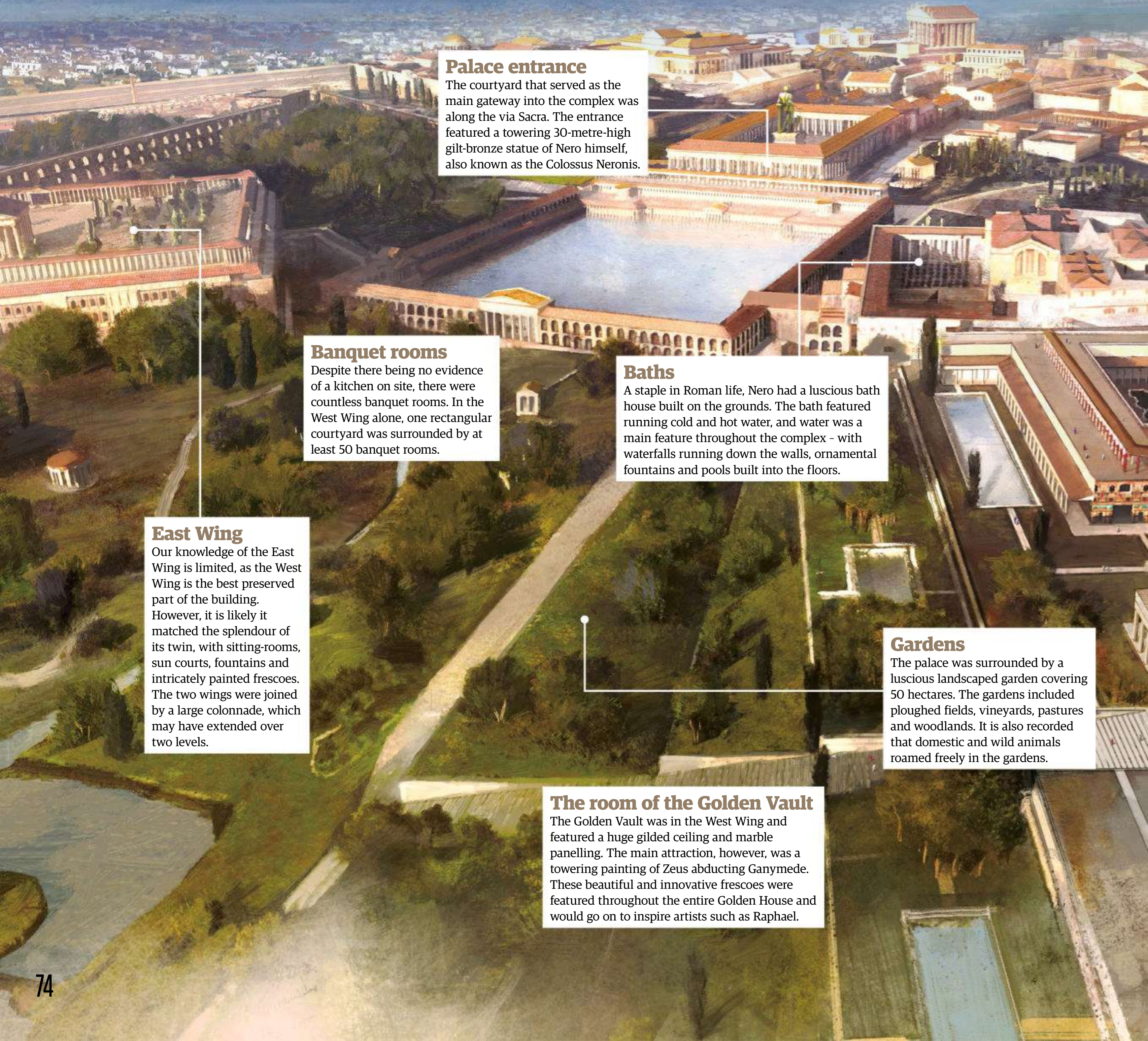
Christians were crucified and burned after the Fire of Rome

The Domus Aurea

Nero's self-indulgence is no secret – the emperor did not shrink at the idea of spending enormous amounts on himself while his subjects suffered. After the great fire of 64 CE destroyed vast areas of land, Nero saw an opportunity to build the grandest palace the world had ever seen. Nero seized this land, actually owned by several aristocrats, and set about building his dream home: the Domus Aurea or 'Golden House'.

Enlisting the help of the celebrated architect Severus and the engineer Celer, Nero created a pleasure palace unlike any seen before. The vast complex included landscaped gardens, a huge man-made lake and an imperial retreat with 150 beautifully decorated rooms. Glimmering with delicate gold leaf, semi-precious stones and ivory, upon the project's completion Nero proclaimed, "Now I can begin to live like a human being."

After Nero's suicide just four years later, the lake was drained and vast areas of the palace were torn down by Vespasian, who also began constructing the Colosseum where the lake had stood. Baths were also later built on the land. It wasn't until the Renaissance that interest surrounding the remains was renewed – many famous painters explored the ruins, marvelled at the beauty and were inspired in their own work.



Palace entrance

The courtyard that served as the main gateway into the complex was along the via Sacra. The entrance featured a towering 30-metre-high gilt-bronze statue of Nero himself, also known as the Colossus Neronis.

Banquet rooms

Despite there being no evidence of a kitchen on site, there were countless banquet rooms. In the West Wing alone, one rectangular courtyard was surrounded by at least 50 banquet rooms.

Baths

A staple in Roman life, Nero had a luscious bath house built on the grounds. The bath featured running cold and hot water, and water was a main feature throughout the complex – with waterfalls running down the walls, ornamental fountains and pools built into the floors.

East Wing

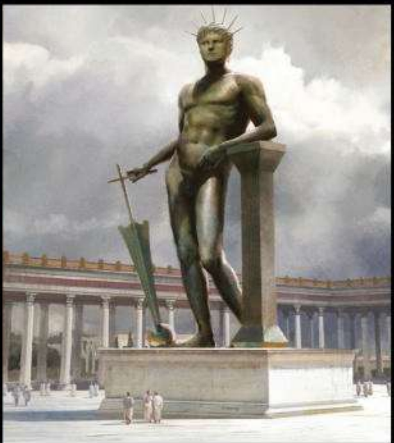
Our knowledge of the East Wing is limited, as the West Wing is the best preserved part of the building. However, it is likely it matched the splendour of its twin, with sitting-rooms, sun courts, fountains and intricately painted frescoes. The two wings were joined by a large colonnade, which may have extended over two levels.

Gardens

The palace was surrounded by a luscious landscaped garden covering 50 hectares. The gardens included ploughed fields, vineyards, pastures and woodlands. It is also recorded that domestic and wild animals roamed freely in the gardens.

The room of the Golden Vault

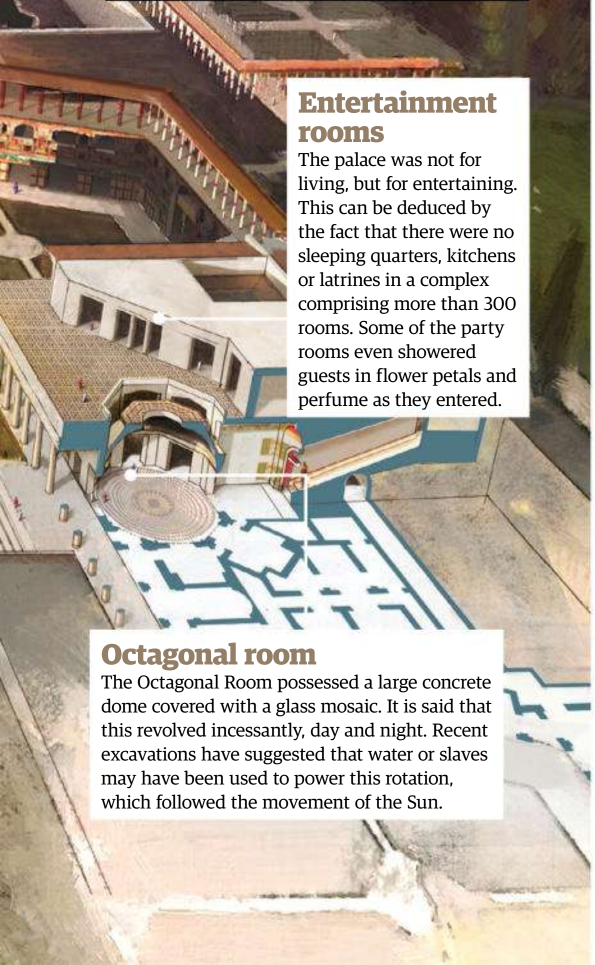
The Golden Vault was in the West Wing and featured a huge gilded ceiling and marble panelling. The main attraction, however, was a towering painting of Zeus abducting Ganymede. These beautiful and innovative frescoes were featured throughout the entire Golden House and would go on to inspire artists such as Raphael.



The Colossus of Nero

When Nero was building his Domus Aurea, he decided its crowning glory would be a huge, imposing bronze statue of himself. Designed by the Greek architect Zenodorus, this mammoth work of art took four years to construct. Sources differ on the statue's true height, but we can presume it was at least 30 metres tall.

After Nero's death, with public opinion of the emperor at an all time low, the statue was moved next to the Colosseum and Nero's face was replaced with that of the sun god. Emperor Commodus later altered it to his own face until, after his death, it was changed back. Today nothing remains of this sculpture except for its foundations.



Entertainment rooms

The palace was not for living, but for entertaining. This can be deduced by the fact that there were no sleeping quarters, kitchens or latrines in a complex comprising more than 300 rooms. Some of the party rooms even showered guests in flower petals and perfume as they entered.

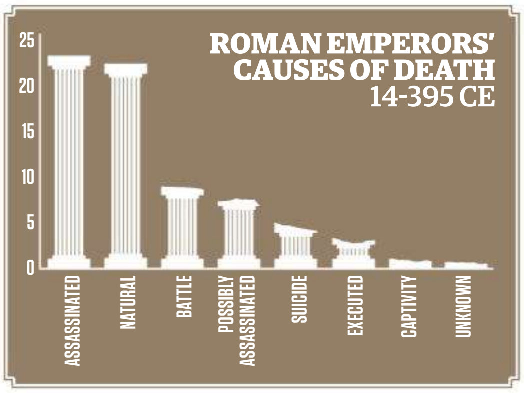
Octagonal room

The Octagonal Room possessed a large concrete dome covered with a glass mosaic. It is said that this revolved incessantly, day and night. Recent excavations have suggested that water or slaves may have been used to power this rotation, which followed the movement of the Sun.

Across Rome, Christians were arrested, devoured by dogs, crucified and burned. There are even accounts of Nero using oil-soaked Christians as torches in his gardens.

The public had been right about one thing: Nero did want to build his huge villa, and the newly cleared land made the perfect spot. However, after excessively spending on his own artistic pursuits, the emperor was running low on funds. In order to pay for his ambitious building project, he sold senior positions in public office to the highest bidders, raised taxes and took money from temples. Nero's frivolous spending had caused the currency to devalue for the first time in the empire's history, and to try to rebuild his funds, he reinstated a policy that allowed him to confiscate property from those suspected of treason.

For many people, this was the final straw. In 65 CE, a plot was hatched to assassinate Nero and place Piso, an aristocrat, in his place. However, the plot was discovered before it could be carried out. Many of the men involved were Nero's previous advisers and close friends, but Nero showed no restraint in having them all executed. Killing his enemies had worked very well for Nero so far, but that was when he only had a few rivals. Now almost all of Rome hated him, and he couldn't kill everyone.



Three years later, Gaius Julius Vindex, a governor, publicly rebelled against Nero's harsh tax policies. He was swiftly joined by another governor, Servius Sulpicius Galba. Although Gaius' forces were squashed and Gaius executed, Galba still lived, and as the main living force against Nero, he quickly gained support. Nero declared him a public enemy, but this seemed only to increase his follower numbers. Even the prefect of Nero's Praetorian Guard abandoned him and declared his allegiance to Galba. Many men who had likely been too scared to act alone saw this as their chance to finally raise their voices against the emperor and his greedy, ruthless ways, and Galba's support grew and grew.

Nero was self-indulgent and tyrannical, but he wasn't stupid. He knew it was time to run. He decided to flee east to the provinces that were still loyal to him. However, even his own officers refused to help him, quoting a line from Vergil's *Aeneid*: "Is it so dreadful a thing then to die?" Escape was too good for Nero. Disgrace was too kind to the man who had slaughtered and destroyed the lives of his people. Death was what the people, and his own men, craved.

Nero had no option but to return home to his palace, his last place of sanctuary. However, he struggled to sleep, and when he awoke, he found that the palace guard had also abandoned him. Anxious and panic stricken, he sent hasty messages to his friends' chambers, but no replies came. Even they had forsaken him. Nero had lost everything – his safety, his throne and his cherished popularity. He called for anyone adept with a sword to come and end his life, but nobody appeared, and his cries echoed in his empty palace: "Have I neither friend nor foe?"

The emperor managed to escape to a villa six kilometres outside the city with four loyal freedmen, where he ordered them to dig a grave for him. Before it was finished, a message arrived – Nero had been declared a public enemy and the Senate was to execute him by beating. It is unlikely that this would have occurred; there was, after all, still some devotion to the Julio-Claudian family, of which Nero was the last in line. If there was no loyalty to Nero, the bloodline at least would give him a chance of survival.

Nero, however, did not see this. He had been abandoned by everyone, he had lost everything, and he was convinced his life was next. First he begged one of his companions to kill him, an act they refused to comply with, and then, upon hearing the horsemen approaching, he had no option but to take his own life. Even here he failed; consumed by fear, he forced his secretary to do the deed for him. Nero still lived as the horsemen entered, and he survived long enough to utter his last words as the men struggled to stop the bleeding: "Too late! This is fidelity!" On 9 June 68 CE, on the anniversary of Octavia's death, the last in the Julio-Claudian line was dead.

By the time he reached Rome, Galba had already been proclaimed emperor. As favoured as he was, Galba's reign would not be a peaceful one and he would be dead within a year. Nero had not been a good emperor, but with his ancient line dried up, chaos claimed the city and war waged.

Nero's legacy, however, would live on. To Christians he became a figure so rooted in pain and anguish that he took on the form of the Antichrist. A rumour began that Nero had not died at all and instead would return. This became a legend almost Christ-like in its retelling, surviving hundreds of years after his death, even into the 5th century, and at least three imposters proclaiming to be Nero led rebellions in his name.

Because of these things and the influence they had on historians, it is almost impossible to distinguish who Nero really was. Today he has taken on a super-villain status that increases with every retelling of his life. The real man behind the myth may be dead forever, but the spectre of Emperor Nero, and the pain he brought his people, flourishes to this day.

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Julia Maesa

If it wasn't for the political prowess of arguably one of history's most powerful women, Rome may evolved into a very different empire

Julia Maesa was visibly dismayed. Her grandson, Varius Avitus Bassianus, had begun to laugh, his body shaking with joy at the spectacle before him. He had become Rome's 25th emperor as a 14-year-old boy and crowds of people screaming, running and pushing in their desperate attempts to get away from the poisonous snakes he had unleashed among them.

She knew it had become typical of the behaviour of Emperor Elagabalus, as he was known. His immoral mind would tick over with brutal, cruel and wicked ways of causing hurt, panic and revulsion. He'd lash guests to water-wheels to drown them; sacrifice children so he could use their guts to read the future. For Maesa, a woman of Syrian origin who had played such as large part in his ascension, this wasn't how it was supposed to be.

Julia Maesa was the daughter of Gaius Julius Bassianus, priest of the sun god Heliogabalus

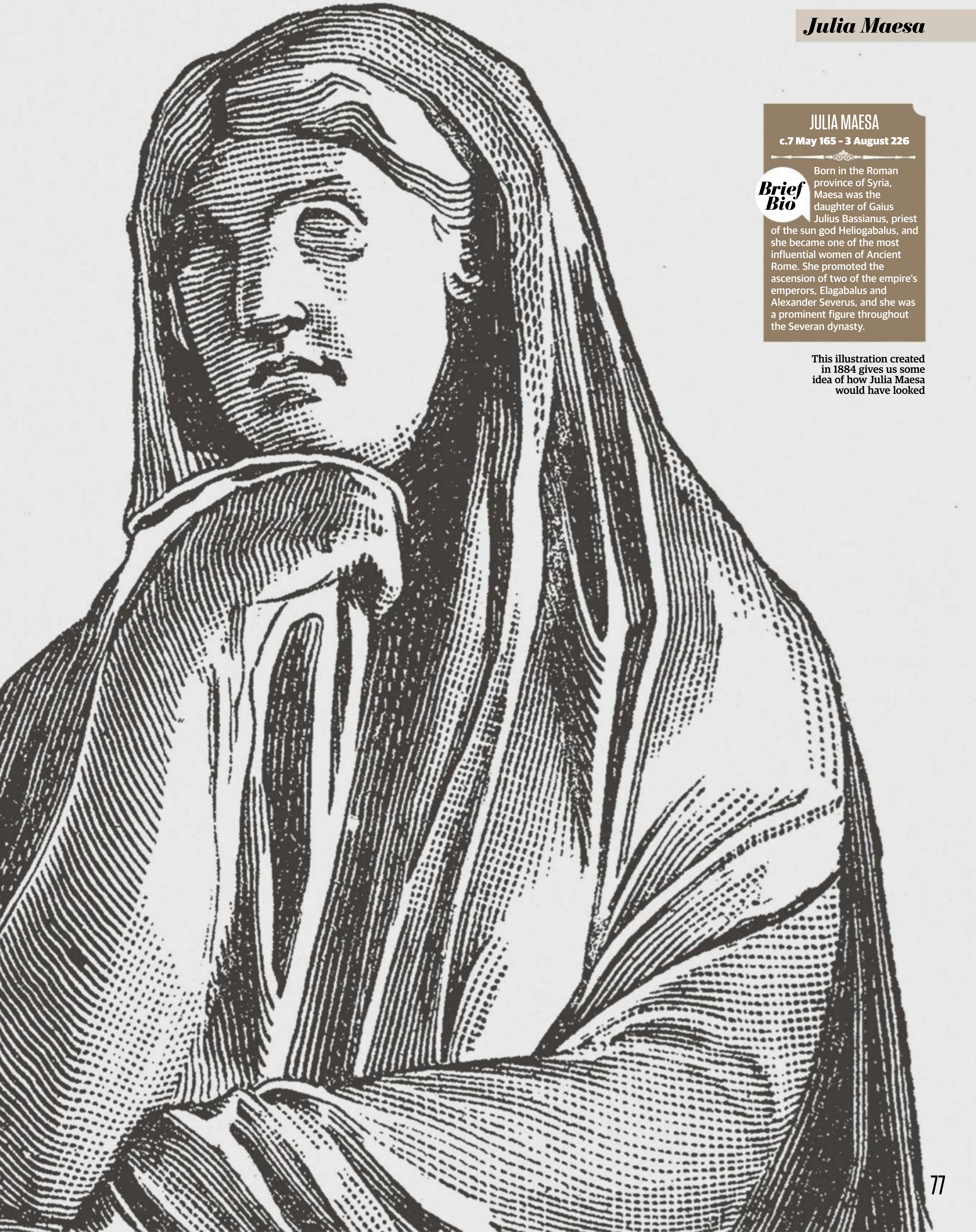
Maesa was at first typical of the wives and mothers of emperors who ruled the empire at this time. Not only had she become experienced in the political machinations of Rome and the to-ings and fro-ings of court life, she held a high position, having assumed her place in the ruling circle from the moment Lucius Septimius Severus ended Didius Julianus' nine-week reign in a vicious bloodbath to become emperor in 193 CE.

As lady luck would have it, Severus had married Maesa's younger sister, Julia Domna, in the late 180s. When he ruled Rome and sowed the seeds of the Severan dynasty, Maesa was able to enjoy both high privilege and a high position in society. She was also able to exert a strong influence on the direction of Rome and its leaders, making her one of history's most powerful women. She needed to be strong because trouble was never too far away.

Initially, her position was relatively secure. Her husband, the Syrian nobleman Julius Avitus, was promoted to the Roman Senate and given the rank of Praetor, and she watched, satisfied, as Severus' eldest son, Marcus Aurelius Severus Antoninus Augustus (nicknamed Caracalla), ruled Rome with his father from 198. Caracalla's brother, Geta, joined the pair in 209, but trouble brewed shortly after. The year Severus died, Caracalla had Geta murdered. But only when Caracalla himself was assassinated by an army commander in 217 CE did Maesa's position become rather more precarious.

Caracalla had been good to Maesa. He'd allowed her to retain her high status and she lived for a long time with her sister on the imperial estates, enjoying the benefits of a rich education and a comfortable lifestyle. Much of that was down to Domna who, ancient sources suggest, oversaw Roman government policies and looked after administrative life. Yet shortly after Caracalla's death, Domna committed suicide and the emperor's successor, the Praetorian Guard prefect Macrinus, severed the Severan dynasty. He nominated his son, Diadumenian, Caesar and successor.

Maesa was forced to leave to Rome and she headed back to Emesa in Syria. In what was perhaps a nod to her standing in society, Macrinus



JULIA MAESA

c.7 May 165 – 3 August 226

Brief Bio

Born in the Roman province of Syria, Maesa was the daughter of Gaius Julius Bassianus, priest of the sun god Heliogabalus, and she became one of the most influential women of Ancient Rome. She promoted the ascension of two of the empire's emperors, Elagabalus and Alexander Severus, and she was a prominent figure throughout the Severan dynasty.

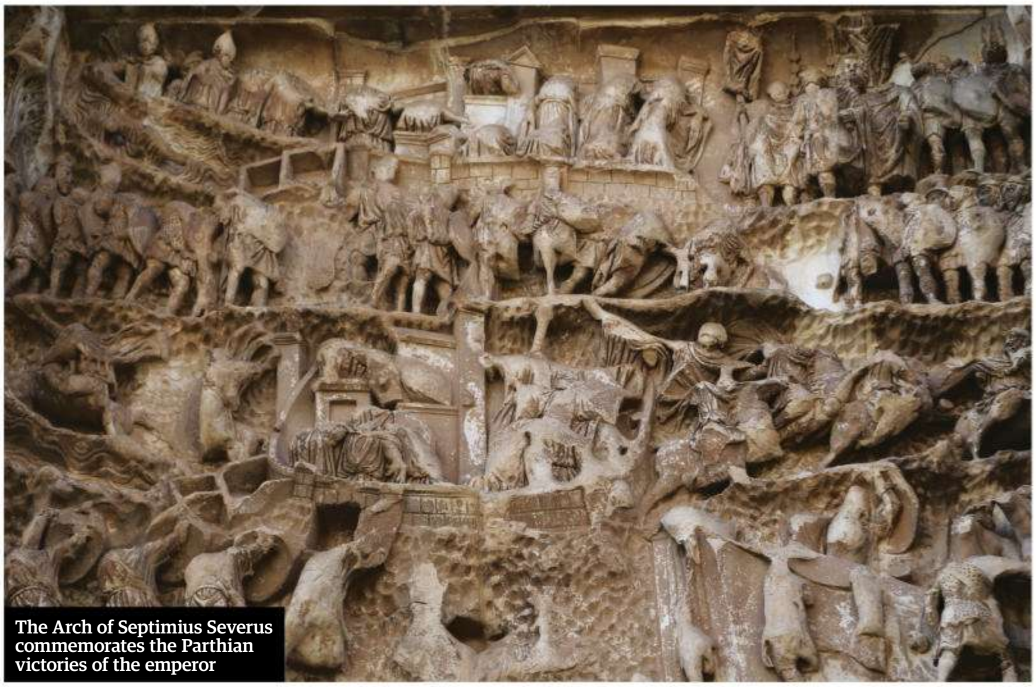
This illustration created in 1884 gives us some idea of how Julia Maesa would have looked permitted her to retain the immense wealth she had accumulated – a key mistake on his part, as it turned out. For although her power and influence was severely diminished, Maesa was adamant that she would return. This moment she was banished heralded the start of Maesa's true political manoeuvrings as she took over from where Domna left off and vowed to do everything she could to rescue the dynastic family's standing and re-establish its lineage.

Maesa was determined that a member of her family would rule Rome and since the rules of succession meant only men could assume such a position, neither of her daughters, Julia Soaemias and Julia Mamaea, were suitable. But Soaemias' son would be perfect, Maesa thought, and so she hatched her plan to oust Macrinus. Varius Avitus Bassianus had become her chosen one.

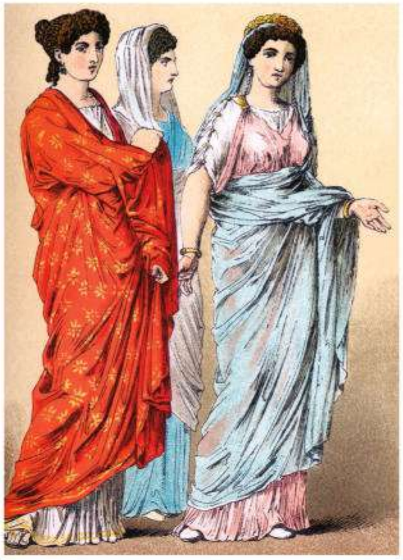
Her idea was to spread the rumour that Bassianus was not born to his father Sextus Varius Marcellus but had, instead, been Caracalla's illegitimate son. She did this with his mother's blessing and, as word got around that there could well be a viable, hereditary successor, deep divisions began to form among Macrinus' supporters. The emperors' soldiers began to gradually turn on their ruler, but they were not entirely happy with him to begin with. Already dissatisfied that the emperor was of Mauretanian origin and a member of the equestrian class, he was seen by traditionalists to be a stark departure from his senatorial predecessors.

It only really took a payment by Maesa to the garrison at Raphanaea for allegiances to change. This in itself was a curious action on Maesa's part – evidence that she was more than willing to step into roles that went against the Roman social norms. Women did not get involved in matters of the military, nor send men into war in their interests. But this is what she sought and the result was the killing of Macrinus and the beginning of Bassianus' rule. Elagabalus' time had come.

Despite her joy at once again being part of Rome's ruling circle, Elagabalus disappointed Maesa and her daughter immediately, not least because of his tendencies towards religion rather than the empire and army. He would be involved in numerous scandals, marrying Aquilia Severa, one of the Vestal Virgins, and he would put his god, Elagabalus, before others. She tempered her disagreements, though, since her stock was rising fast. Both she and Soaemias were bestowed the powers of an empress. Maesa became Augusta avia Augusti (Augusta, grandmother of Augustus).



The Arch of Septimius Severus commemorates the Parthian victories of the emperor



A typical example of how women tended to dress in late republican and imperial times, around 100 BCE and 100 CE

Women in Ancient Rome

Women had limited public roles in Ancient Rome, and while they traditionally remained under a man's control, expected to bear children and barred from military service, they were able to own land, take full responsibility in managing households and, if they so wished, divorce and take back a dowry.

Greater restrictions were introduced by Emperor, Augustus, which saw stricter divorce laws and adultery become a crime against the state, but women were respected and were more than capable of standing up for themselves if need be. They took positions as doctors, hairdressers, dressmakers and shopkeepers, and they were educated.

While they were not at the forefront of political life, high-ranking women were still able to influence the throne and they did so regularly, proving to be charming and politically adept. The empress Agrippina the Younger, for instance, was ambitious and domineering, seeking strong control over Nero during the first few months of his reign. But it was all very much behind the scenes. They were unable to talk in the forum and there was an idea that women shouldn't speak out in general. One who did try to speak in the forum was labelled "barking".

Timeline

165 CE

- **Maesa is born**
  Although the actual date cannot be absolutely certain, Julia Maesa is understood to have been born on 7 May, with the year assumed to have been around 165 CE.
  c.7 May 165 CE

- **First daughter is born**
  Maesa's first daughter, Julia Soaemias, is born. By this stage, Maesa was married to the Syrian noble Gaius Julius Avitus Alexianus. Women tended to marry aged 15.
  180 CE

- **Septimus Severus becomes emperor**
  Following fierce battling, Septimius Severus kills Didius Julianus and dispatches the generals Pescennius Niger and Clodius Albinus. Married to Maesa's sister, he becomes emperor.
  193 CE

- **Elagabalus born**
  Soaemias' bears her second child – Sextus Varius Avitus Bassianus – with Sextus Varius Marcellus. His birth will be highly important to Maesa's fierce ambitions later down the line.
  203 CE

- **Severus' reign comes to end**
  Severus dies peacefully in Eboracum, (modern-day York, England). He was reigning with his son, Caracalla, who continues the Severan dynasty for another six years.
  211 CE

- **Caracalla is killed**
  Caracalla has been a successful emperor. He puts much faith in his mother, Julia Domna, but when he is killed, Domna loses her influence. Sick with cancer, she commits suicide. It is left to Maesa to exert her influence.
  217 CE

There is actually some doubt over the true influence of Maesa and the other women of the Severan dynasty. Some academics hold the view that the women were simply tools of propaganda, that all of their work was very much behind the scenes and not directly influential. We can never know for sure but there is a school of thought that Maesa – and Domna before her – had only followed the traditional roles of the Roman mother.

And yet, because Maesa and her family had survived different emperors, they appeared to benefit from a strong level of protection at the highest of levels. Macrinus had been reluctant to strip Maesa of her wealth and prestige, a move that effectively paved the way for her to comeback and threaten his position. Maesa proved, if nothing else, to be cunning and in possession of a politically strategic mind. In her determination to get back to Rome, she was capable of not only hatching a most brilliant plan in gathering support for her grandson but actually succeeding, too.

> It was not only remarkable that Maesa was a woman in a position of power, she also survived where her allies perished

Elagabalus appeared to underestimate her too. Many an emperor before him would have banished someone like Maesa once he had been put into power for fear that she would seek favours. Instead, Maesa not only remained close, she was unafraid to advise and warn the emperor that his behaviour was not that expected of a Roman ruler. When he continued to do things in his own, unique way, Maesa once again sought to influence the lineage of the dynasty and she is said to have underlined the influential position she came to hold.

In a shrewd move, she sought to position another grandson, Alexander Severus, born to Mamaea and Gessius Marcianus, as a potential ruler. Alexander was a very different personality to his cousin, far better behaved and more befitting the role of emperor, and Maesa believed he would be better at future-proofing the Severan dynasty. Elagabalus became wary of the 14-year-old and – rightly, as it happens – grew paranoid that Alexander's increasing popularity among soldiers was posing a threat to his own position. But Maesa, once again, proved to be cunning and persuaded him to name Alexander as his official heir, a move granting him the title of Caesar.

She was unafraid to go against Soaemias in a jostle for power or side with her other daughter, Mamaea. Even when the emperor twice plotted to assassinate Alexander, she remained determined. Knowing Elagabalus had greatly upset the Praetorian Guard, she bided her time and they ended up rebelling in 222 – murdering Elagabalus as he cowered in a latrine and killing Soaemias too – Alexander became emperor and so Maesa held on to power. This, as it turned out, would see her through the remaining few years of her life.

During this time, Maesa would take on more administrative responsibilities, even having a hand in selecting a 16-strong council of senators. It was also a just and progressive period headed by a man beloved of his people. It allowed her to remain in peace until her life came to an end around 226. Even then, her legacy continued. Like Domna before her, she was duly deified.

Playing dirty in Roman politics

Roman politics, as today, was no stranger to backstabbing and dirty tricks. Marcus Tullius Cicero was a philosopher, orator, consul and lawyer, but he always regarded his manoeuvrings in politics around 64 BCE to be his greatest achievement and much of that was down to his brother Quintus.

The sibling said that to win elections, a politician had to promise everything to everyone, call in favours, understand the weakness of the opposition, flatter voters and give them hope. No wonder he has been so influential since.

But even before he arrived on the scene, politicians would do all they could to gain power, whether sponsoring huge sporting events in the run up to an election, bribing influencers and scrawling slogans on walls ("The late night drinkers all ask you to elect Marcus Cerrinius Vatia as aedile"). Indeed, pretending that certain groups of people, be they gamblers or prostitutes, supported an opponent was a common trick.

Women such as Maesa would have been well-versed in how such politics worked and they proved more than willing to play along. After all, murder and character assassination were all fair game when it came to jostling for overall power in Ancient Rome.

Defining moment

Regaining her power base

219 CE

Having journeyed from Syria to Rome, Elagabalus is unveiled as Rome's new leader, but Maesa knows she has a job on her hands getting the people to accept him. The teenagers' flamboyance – he insists on wearing purple and gold silk rather than wool – and the fact that he looks like a woman does not entirely endear him to the Romans. Neither does the fact he married a Vestal Virgin. It is a hard sell that is ultimately doomed, but at this point, Maesa is declared an empress together with her daughter, Soaemias. It does not stop her seeking a new emperor, though.

Maesa played a large part in two Roman emperors assuming power, one of the being Elagabalus

Defining moment

The decision maker 223 CE

Alexander listens to Maesa, who effectively becomes the decision maker. By heading the Consilium Principis – the council that had been created by the first Roman emperor, Augustus – she is able to ensure that the Senate will act only in the interests of the emperor, an important role for both the ruler and herself since it was a way to ensure that his time in power would be strong. In many ways, this is an effective reward for all of the behind-the-scenes work she has put in to ensuring the Severan dynasty is revived.

The plotting begins
Maesa does not enjoy life in Syria as much as in Rome, so she looks to take advantage of the large army Caracalla has in the east.
218 CE

Installing a new emperor
Having told the army 14-year-old Varius Avitus Bassianus is Caracalla's illegitimate son, battle soon ensues. Fierce battles eventually result in glorious victory and the teenage boy is earmarked as Emperor Elagabalus.
218 CE

Elagabalus is killed
Given his unpopularity, it's surprising that Elagabalus survives as long as he does. Maesa persuades him to accept another grandson, Severus Alexander as heir, so when Elagabalus is assassinated, there is a replacement.
222 CE

Hailing the new emperor
Maesa's strong part in the plot to have the Praetorian Guard has worked well and her position is consolidated under Alexander. She assumes power in the imperial government.
222 CE

IVLIA MAESA AVG

226 CE

Maesa dies in her 60s
Just as there is uncertainly over her year of birth, so historians are unsure when she dies. While some say 226 CE, others believe it to have been 223 or 224 CE.
c. 226 CE

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Hadrian

Meet the emperor who turned the Roman Empire from conquest to consolidation

When the death of his father left ten-year-old Publius Aelius Hadrianus an orphan, it was the beginning of a remarkable series of fortuitous events that would end in the boy reaching the highest rank in Ancient Rome. Young Hadrian was named a ward of his father's cousin, a rising army officer named Trajan. Just over a decade later, as Hadrian was beginning his own career, Trajan was named the successor of Emperor Nerva and over the next 20 years, Hadrian's public service saw him serve in the army and hold a number of political offices.

When Trajan succumbed to illness in August 117 CE, the now-41-year-old Hadrian was told that he had been adopted by the emperor on his deathbed and named as his heir. Doubts of his legitimacy arose almost immediately: the adoption document was signed by Trajan's wife rather than the emperor himself; the servant who had stayed at Trajan's side during his final hours had conveniently died soon after his master; and four leading senators and potential rivals were summarily executed by the Praetorian Guard.

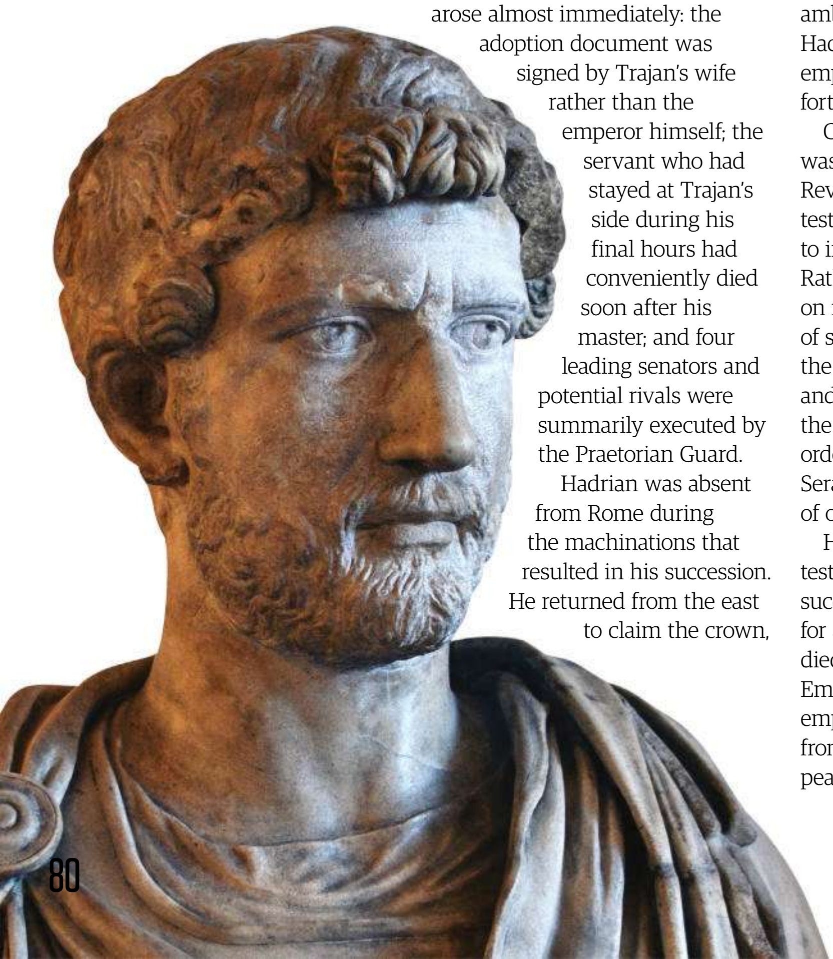
Hadrian was absent from Rome during the machinations that resulted in his succession. He returned from the east to claim the crown, but he did not stay long. Unlike previous emperors, who tended to live in the capital unless leading a military campaign, Hadrian's 21-year reign saw near-incessant travelling throughout the empire.

His first major expedition saw him survey the distant province of Britannia and order the building of the wall that bears his name. Over the next four years he undertook similar trips to what have now become France, Spain, Algeria and Turkey. He would return to Greece and the troublesome eastern frontier time and again, eventually visiting almost every province during his reign.

Hadrian was supervising a distinct shift in Roman foreign policy. No more was the empire to be one of conquest; instead it was to be one of cosmopolitan assimilation. Trajan's expansionist ambitions in Mesopotamia were abandoned, with Hadrian choosing to secure the borders of the empire instead. Aside from Hadrian's Wall, he built fortifications along the Rhine and Danube.

Compared with his predecessors, Hadrian's reign was remarkably peaceful, with only the Bar Kokhba Revolt in Judaea giving military officers a chance to test themselves in action. Instead, Hadrian looked to improve the existing provinces he had inherited. Rather than imposing colonies of Roman citizens on far-flung territories, Hadrian ordered the creation of semi-autonomous provincial towns governed by the locals. In Rome itself, he rebuilt the Pantheon and constructed the Temple of Venus and Roma, the largest temple in the capital. He may have ordered the repair of war damage in the wealthy Serapeum of Alexandria, and constructed a number of opulent temples and buildings in Athens.

Hadrian's relationship with the Senate was testy, stemming from the suspicious nature of his succession, and he had two more senators executed for an alleged plot in 137 CE. However, when he died the following year, Hadrian's chosen heir – Emperor Antoninus Pius – inherited a largely stable empire that Hadrian had managed to transform from one of aggressive expansion into one of peaceful consolidation.



> "Hadrian's 21-year reign saw near-incessant travelling throughout the empire"

Hadrian is perhaps most remembered for his wall that marked the northernmost border of the empire; parts of it still stand today

Among Hadrian's building projects was his personal villa, a countryside retreat just outside Rome

THE GAY EMPEROR

The love of Hadrian's life was not his childless wife but a Greek boy called Antinous. They first met when Hadrian was around 48 and Antinous was just 12. Pederasty – a sexual relationship between a man and a boy – was a common practice in Greece, but less recognised in Rome.

Antinous joined Hadrian on his journeys through the empire but drowned in an Egyptian river at the age of 18, possibly an accident, possibly a deliberate act of suicide or murder. The devastated emperor immediately declared that his young companion had become a god and spent the rest if his life mourning his loss.

The emperor and his lover captured in marble at the British Museum

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Constantine the Great

Christians had been lion fodder for centuries but under Constantine they clawed their way to acceptability

The young Roman emperor, Constantine, peered skywards towards the clouds, deep in prayer in an area of northern Rome between the Milvian Bridge and Saxa Rubra, a village on the ancient Via Flaminia. As the ruler of Britain and Gaul in an empire by now split into territories, Constantine had travelled a great distance to wage war against his brother-in-law Maxentius, who had seized control of central and southern Italy from Emperor Galerius to become the region's self-proclaimed ruler.

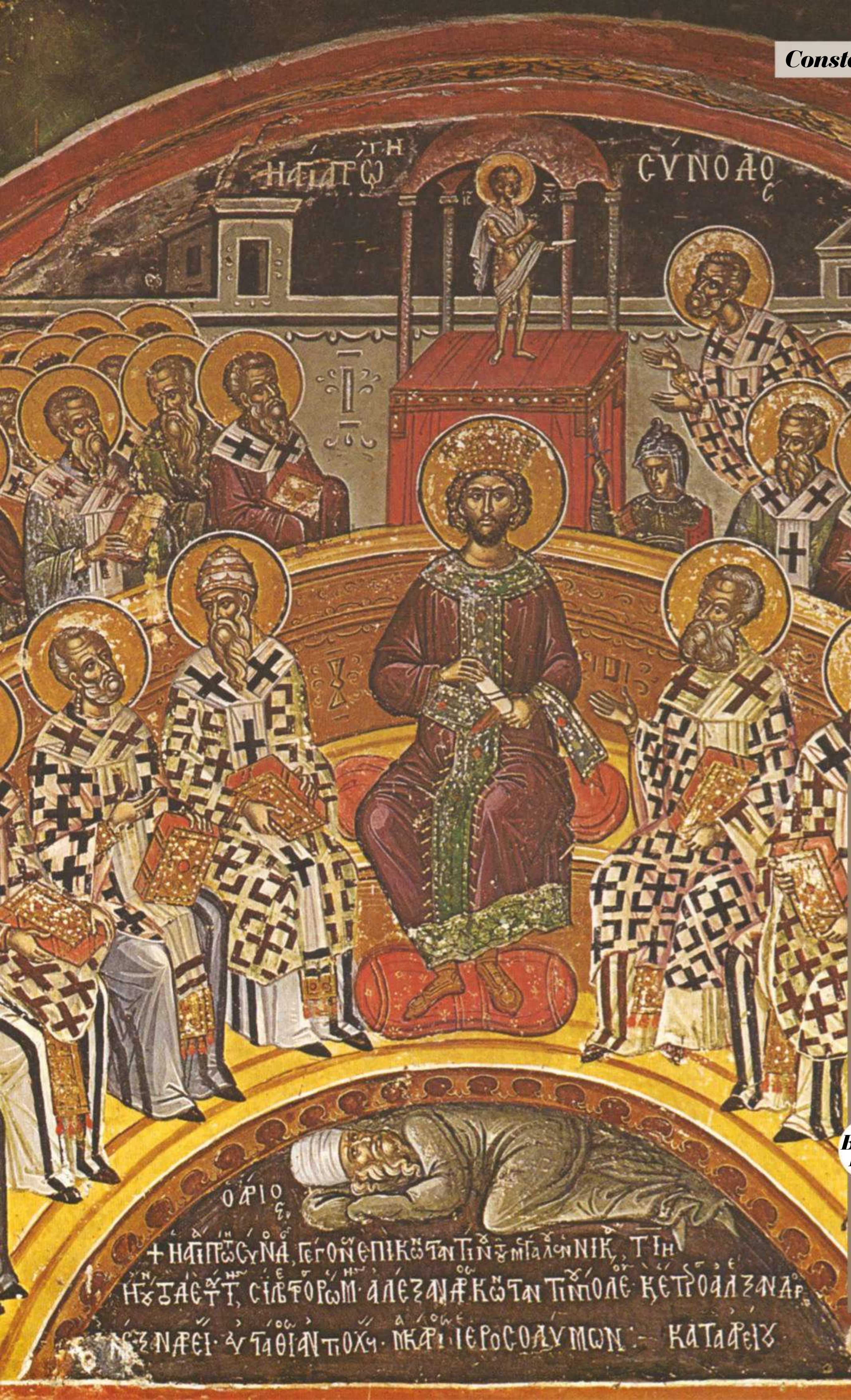
It was 27 October 312 CE and what Constantine saw that day – with the armies preparing for battle the next day – gave him great confidence that he would defeat his rival and went on to change the entire course of religion in the empire. For according to Eusebius, one of the early historians of the Christian Church, while Constantine prayed at noon, a "marvellous sign appeared to him from heaven". It was, he said, the Chi-Rho (the combination of Greek X and P, the first two letters of the name of Christ) just above the Sun, bearing a Greek inscription which translated as "in this sign conquer".

Constantine believed this to be a divine intervention, a hunch confirmed to him in a dream that night when he recalled Jesus Christ had willed him to use the cross in battle. He did, painting the first two letters of Christ's name in Greek on the soldier's shields. Little surprise, then, that when the opposing men were duly defeated by his army and Maxentius drowned in the River Tiber, Constantine was then said to have attributed the victory to the Christian God – a moment that paved the way for a huge change in the way the empire viewed the fast-growing Christian religion. Constantine, until then a pagan polytheist, promptly turned years of Christian persecution on its head and began to fully support the movement.

> Although Constantinople was a Christian city, Constantine still built pagan temples – showing he wasn't devoted exclusively

Of course, this all sounds very fanciful, with many a historian casting doubt on such claims (some say Christianity was instilled in him by his mother, Helena, although this has not been verified either). Although a team of geologists in 2003 found evidence that pointed to a meteor appearing over central Italy in 312, perhaps explaining the light across the sky, an account just one year later makes no reference to the cross appearing in the sky. The first time the dream and the scrawl on the shields appeared to make it into literature was at the hands of the Christian author Lactantius in 314 CE. But whatever the motivation, the outcome was the same: Constantine would come to believe he was the 13th apostle and would go down in history as the first Christian ruler of the Roman Empire.

Rome had been infamously unkind to Christians. It had been the case from the very beginning: Jesus had been crucified in 33 CE despite great reluctance on the part of Judaea's then-governor, Pontius Pilate. But when followers began to believe that Christ had risen, a distinct religious sect began



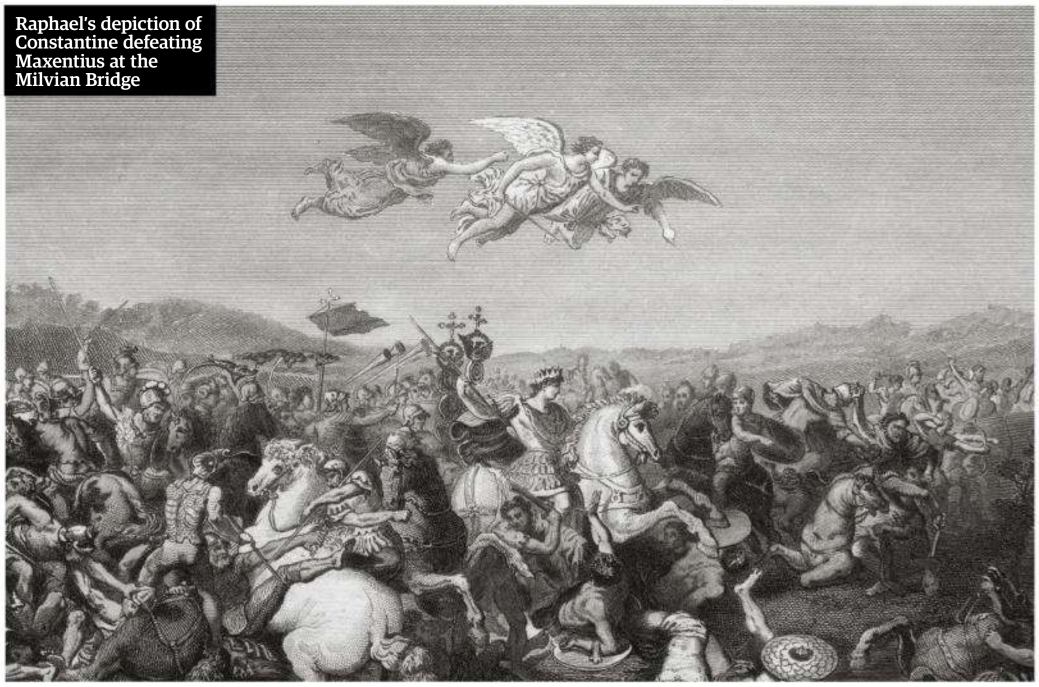
A painting from the first hald of the 16th century depicting the First Council of Nicaea

CONSTANTINE I

c.272 – 337 CE

Brief Bio

Credited with converting the Roman Empire to Christianity, Constantine rose to power during a period of civil war when Rome was split into four territories. He not only went on to become emperor himself, but succeeded in uniting the empire once more. Protecting Christians and founding Constantinople, he came to be known as Constantine the Great.



Raphael's depiction of Constantine defeating Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge

to grow. Persecution of the Christians began when Rome suffered a ferocious fire in 64 CE, which burned for six days and destroyed one-third of the city. Nero sought to temper accusations that he had started it by pointing the finger at the Christians instead. He gathered up some of the followers and engulfed them in flames. Rome suddenly had an enemy within, Nero suggested, and widespread disapproval of them grew.

Christians would be executed in large numbers, usually for entertainment in the Colosseum and provincial arenas. Domitian, who ruled between 81 and 96 CE, made being Christian an illegal act but it didn't appear to deter the religion's growth. On 7 March 203, Vibia Perpetua was among five Christians led into an arena in Carthage, North Africa. Wild beasts attacked them and Perpetua was wounded by a bull - a sword finishing her off. And yet it was seen as a victory for faith over death by the Christians who were unafraid of becoming martyrs and could show the Romans that persecution was completely fruitless. Christians continued to be killed, though - Diocletian was tyrannical against them during his time between 284 and 305 CE - but it only served to make the religion stronger.

It was in this environment that Constantine came to rule from 306. As a ruthless, commendable soldier who had risen through the empire's eastern ranks to become a military tribune under the emperors Diocletian and Galerius, he would have had first-hand experience of how the Romans treated the Christians. But, just as importantly, he would have seen how his father, Constantius, played no part in such persecutions.

Constantius had become the senior western emperor to rule Britain and Gaul in 305 CE, and Constantine, born in the west of the empire, had returned to his roots to be with him shortly after. He barely got time to know his father, who died on 25 July 306 CE during a winter break in a battle against the Picts. But, on Constantius' deathbed recommendation, Constantine was promptly hailed Augustus by his troops. And while he was only accepted as Caesar of the west by Galerius, there was a sense of change in the air.

To many people's surprise, Galerius ended the Diocletianic Persecution of Christianity by issuing an edict of toleration in Serdica in 311 CE, despite being an opponent of the religion (although the growing threat to Rome's imperial authority made the move inevitable). This meant Christianity would be recognised and accepted by the empire and it ended eight years of churches being destroyed, Holy Scriptures being burned, church property being investigated, and privileges and rights being removed. But it was under Constantine that the greater strides were made.

In February 313 CE, he and Licinius, who controlled the Balkans, met in Milan and thrashed out an agreement that promised religious toleration for Christianity within the Roman Empire. "No one whatsoever should be denied the opportunity to give his heart to the observance of the Christian religion," it said. In recognition of the empire being predominantly non-Christian, it also proclaimed

Defining moment
Constantine sent east
293 CE

In order for Diocletian to foster loyalty among those who promoted to rule Rome's territories, sons - including Constantine - were sent eastward. There they resided in Diocletian's court where they were trained as fighters, taught both Latin and Greek and became schooled in the ways of Rome so that, should the time come, they could be effective emperors too. Diocletian ruled a period of relative stability but mainly because of the way he quashed those who threatened his power, among them Christians. It is generally thought that Constantine would have witnessed the relentless persecution of the Christians.

Defining moment
Trouble and strife
306 CE

When Constantine gave notice of to Galerius that he was now emperor, the eastern leadery refused to acknowledge the status and instead granted him the title Caesar, handing the honour of Augustus to Severus. But Constantine still held great power, ruling over Britain, Gaul and Spain. When Maximian's son, Maxentius, rebelled in Rome, it was Severus who was sent to deal with the situation. But he hadn't reckoned on Maxentius offering his father co-rule, their joint force earning loyalty from the soldiers and securing victory over Severus. The following year, Severus was executed.

Timeline

272 CE

Constantine is born
Although the actual year is not certain, Constantine is born to a Roman army officer called Flavius Valerius Constantius and his consort, Helena, who today is revered as a saint.
February c.272 CE

Father becomes Caesar
Emperor Diocletian appoints two junior emperors, or Caesars: elevating Galerius in the East and allowing Maximian to promote Constantius in the West. It is part of a tetrarchy, or rule of four.
293 CE

Father made emperor
When Diocletian retires, both Constantius and Galerius are promoted to Augustus of their territories. Constantine, overlooked as Caesar, travels to Britain to help his father campaign.
305 CE

Constantine proclaims himself emperor
When Constantius dies in Eboracum, (modern-day York), the Tetrarchy begins to unravel. Constantius asks his soldiers to make Constantine his successor, which they duly do.
306 CE

that people were free to worship any deity they wished, heralding what is widely seen as the touchstone of religious tolerance. For the first time, religions, whether Jewish, Christian, pagan or those that followed the traditional Roman gods, could exist alongside each other.

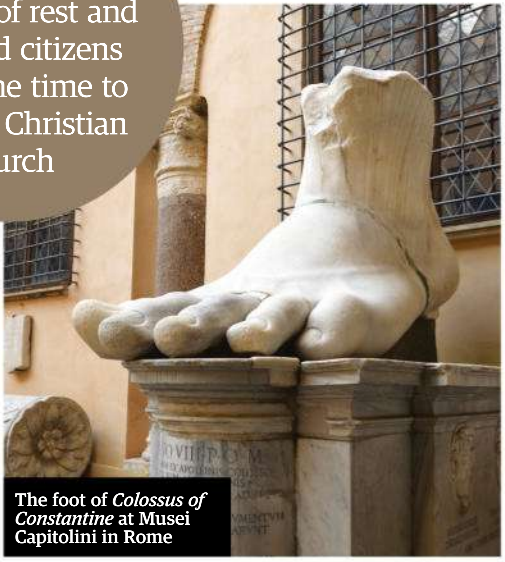
But it was also the first time Christianity had been backed by the Roman Empire. It became institutionalised, with male bishops becoming government figures and women pushed into the background. At the same time, Christian property was returned and churches were permitted. But as well as restoring peace, stability and security, Constantine also turned Christianity into a fighting religion and troops fought under the symbol of the cross. On 18 September 324, Constantine battled Licinius at Chrysopolis and won, leaving him the sole emperor of Rome, thus ending the Tetrarchy that had cut the empire into four.

The victor felt a fresh start was needed and so he turned to the site of old Byzantium. There he sought to established a new capital, Constantinople - modern-day Istanbul in Turkey - which not only bore his name but grew, after his death, into the largest and wealthiest city in Europe. Thought to be easily defendable and holding a strategic position, it also became a Christian city. Not that Rome wasn't turned around, too. Constantine oversaw a massive religious building programme, ordering the construction of a basilica over the top of Ancient Rome's Circus of Nero between 318 and 322. It was completed in 360 CE, years after his death. Vatican City is situated in that spot today.

But even then, Constantine's Christian plans were not satiated. He then went to great lengths to make the religion fully legalised across the empire. The First Council of Nicaea - a council of Christian bishops - was convened in 325 CE. This ratified the doctrine of the Trinity - the combination of the Jewish God as the Father, Jesus his son, and the Holy Spirit being the natural force. The full acceptance of Christianity didn't lead to entirely peaceful times - Christians ended up turning on each other amid controversy over the precise interpretation of the faith - but it allowed it to firmly establish itself without fear.

Despite overseeing so much religious change, Constantine himself was only baptised in his dying days, although that was quite common at the time. His late conversion to Christianity came in 337, shortly after Easter, when he had fallen ill. Choosing the River Jordan because it was said to be where Christ had been baptised by John the Baptist, the Arian (here referring to doctrine that Jesus is the son of God) bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia performed the ceremony, absolving the emperor of the many sins he felt he had accumulated. He died on 22 May 337, aged 65.

Constantine declared Sunday as a day of rest and intended citizens to use the time to attend a Christian church

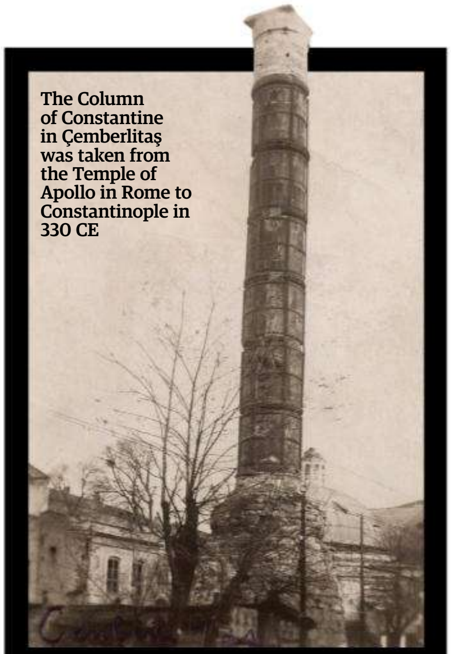

The foot of *Colossus of Constantine* at Musei Capitolini in Rome

Defining moment

Battle of Mardia

317 CE

Although Constantine and Licinius have worked together - the Edict of Milan having paved the way for Christian tolerance - any peace is not to last. Constantine invaded the Balkan provinces ruled by Licinius the year before and now they are to battle again. It leads Licinius to agree Constantine is his superior in government and ushers in a seven-year peace. In the meantime, Licinius (in 320) begins to oppress Christians again. In 324, civil war breaks out. There are numerous battles culminating in Licinius being defeated in the Battle of Chrysopolis.


The Column of Constantine in Çemberlitaş was taken from the Temple of Apollo in Rome to Constantinople in 330 CE

Building a new Rome

They say Rome wasn't built in a day and neither, come to that, was the empire's new capital, which came to be built upon the ancient Greek colony of Byzantium. Constantine had earmarked the site in 324 CE, noting that it stood between Europe and Asia, far closer to the eastern part of the empire than Rome and offering the chance of a fresh start for a new, combined land brought together under his rule.

The new Rome was built over six years and it was split into 14 regions, just like Rome had been. Consecrated in 330 CE, it was walled for defence and filled with art taken from Greek and Roman cities. There were new palaces and churches, and a ceremonial square - the Augustaion - was also laid, surrounded by porticoes. But, since Christians were not in favour of the bloody gladiatorial games that had taken place elsewhere, the amphitheatre was abandoned.

The city became known as Constantinople, in honour of the emperor, and it was seen as the gateway to Europe. It was also the centre for trade and, for a long time, the world's largest and richest city. But centuries later, as the Ottoman Empire grew all around it, Christian Europe would eventually fear its fall. The city finally succumbed to the Islamists following a month-long siege in 1453.

Continued unsettling rebellion
Licinius has been appointed Augustus in the West, but Maximian and Maxentius still cause problems for Constantine. Maximian commits suicide in 310, and the following year, Maxentius fights Licinius.
310 CE

Battle of the Milvian Bridge
The rivalries having come to a head, Constantine and Maxentius – both brothers-in-law – fight a fierce battle. Maxentius is killed. The day before, Constantine has apparently received a message from Christ.
28 October 312 CE

Constantine backs Christianity
312 is said to have had a profound effect on Constantine, and he ensures the persecution of the Christians is over with a declaration of religious tolerance.
313 CE

A united empire
Constantine becomes sole emperor. Tetrarchy ends and he is free to push forward with his vision for the empire. He looks to move the capital from Rome to what would become Constantinople.
324 CE

First Council of Nicaea
Constantine looks to establish the first ecumenical council of the Christian Church and lays out many of the traditions that will become part and parcel of Christianity.
325 CE

337

Constantine baptised and dies
Constantine becomes a Christian himself in the last days of his life when he washes away his sins in a baptism. He dies of illness on 22 May 337.
22 May 337 CE

© Getty Images

The Theodosians

Meet the last imperial family of the whole empire

The empire was in trouble. Serious trouble. On 9 August 378 CE, the Augustus of the East, Emperor Valens, had led his troops into battle against an army of Goths near the city of Adrianople. Expecting to achieve an easy victory over the barbarians, some Roman soldiers attacked precipitately while negotiations were still continuing between Valens and the barbarian king. With Roman discipline and coordination beginning to dissolve, the Goths delivered a final, fatal blow when their cavalry, which had been away from camp foraging through the countryside, returned and surrounded the extended and disorganised Roman forces.

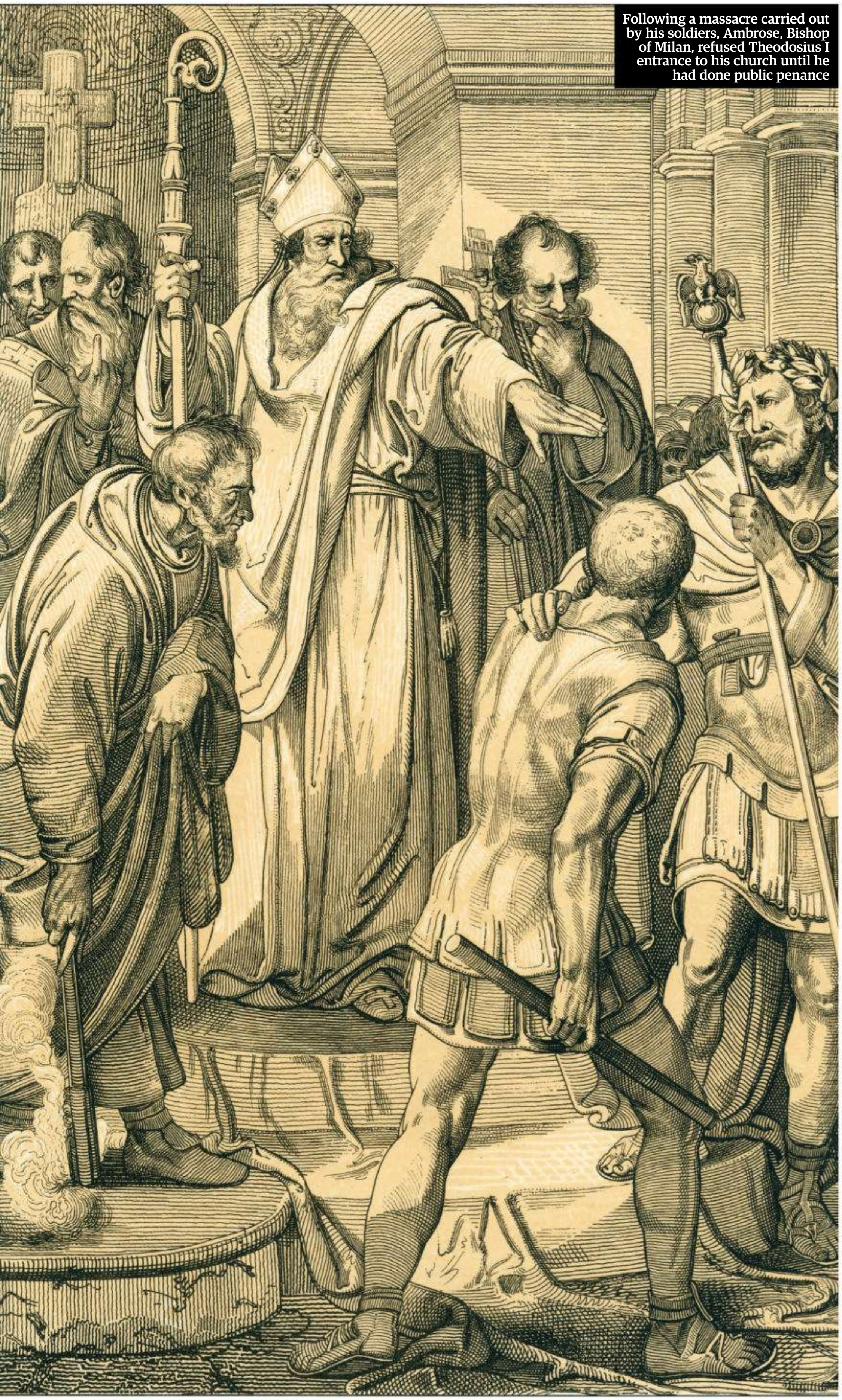
The Roman army, the key imperial military force in the East, was utterly routed. Emperor Valens himself was killed in the chaos, dying an anonymous death among the thousands of legionaries who died that day. It was a humiliation from which the empire never really recovered - indeed, some historians trace the fall of the Western Empire to this catastrophic defeat. In the chaos that followed, the surviving emperor, Gratian, Augustus of the West, needed an experienced general to take over in the east and bring some stability to the situation. In desperate straits, Gratian sent messengers to a general living quietly in Spain. His name was Theodosius and his father, Theodosius the Elder, had played the key role in the defeat of what the Romans called the Great Conspiracy, when the Picts, Saxons and Gaels launched a coordinated attack on Britain in 368 CE. His son, Theodosius, had been a key instrument in that campaign before distinguishing himself in further campaigns against the barbarians. But in 376 CE, Theodosius the Elder, despite an unblemished military record and a history of loyalty to the emperor, was fatally caught up in imperial politics and executed. Fearing for his own life and that of his family, the son had withdrawn to family estates in Spain, far from the snake pits of the emperor's courts.

The invitation to take command of the East was, effectively, a promise of the imperial purple, and Theodosius accepted it. He was faced with the question of what to do about the Goths. Large numbers of them had settled within the empire in the Balkans, and Theodosius soon recognised that it was impractical and probably impossible to expel them. What he needed to do was co-opt those who were amenable to accepting Rome as their overlord, while isolating and destroying those who wanted to carve out independent kingdoms. Theodosius set about this with considerable guile and skill, inviting the paramount Gothic chieftain, Athanaric, to Constantinople, where he proceeded to dazzle the barbarian with the wealth, opulence and magnificence of what was the greatest city on Earth. Athanaric was so enthralled that he agreed to Theodosius' offer of alliance, with the Goths answering to Athanaric serving the imperial standard. And even though Athanaric died soon afterwards, his chieftains were so impressed with the splendour of the funeral that Theodosius laid on for Athanaric that they kept to the treaty. Meanwhile, Theodosius, through careful intelligence and skilful campaigning, slowly destroyed the Gothic chieftains unwilling to agree to his terms.

The final treaty, which was signed on 3 October 382 CE, enabled the Goths to settle in Thrace, south of the Danube frontier, and to fight in the Roman army as a national contingent. Theodosius had managed to quell the immediate crisis.

> "Theodosius slowly destroyed the Gothic chieftains unwilling to agree to his terms"

A bust of Emperor Theodosius II, whose reign was long in part because he wielded almost no power himself



Following a massacre carried out by his soldiers, Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, refused Theodosius I entrance to his church until he had done public penance

The Theodosians

The family that split the empire

THEODOSIUS I

Dates ruled: 379 – 395
Area ruled: Last emperor to rule East and West

Theodosius stabilised the Eastern Empire, then ruled it all for the final years of his reign. But Theodosius neglected to provide heirs up the roles given them.

HONORIUS

Dates ruled: 395 – 423
Area ruled: Western Roman Empire

As emperor, Honorius proved entirely inadequate to the challenges facing the empire, his only talent being personal survival, his chief failing an unerring ability to consistently listen to bad counsel.

ARCADIUS

Dates ruled: 395 – 408
Area ruled: Eastern Roman Empire

The elder brother to Honorius, Arcadius was as ineffectual as his sibling but without the latter's preternatural talent for somehow surviving personal incompetence.

THEODOSIUS II

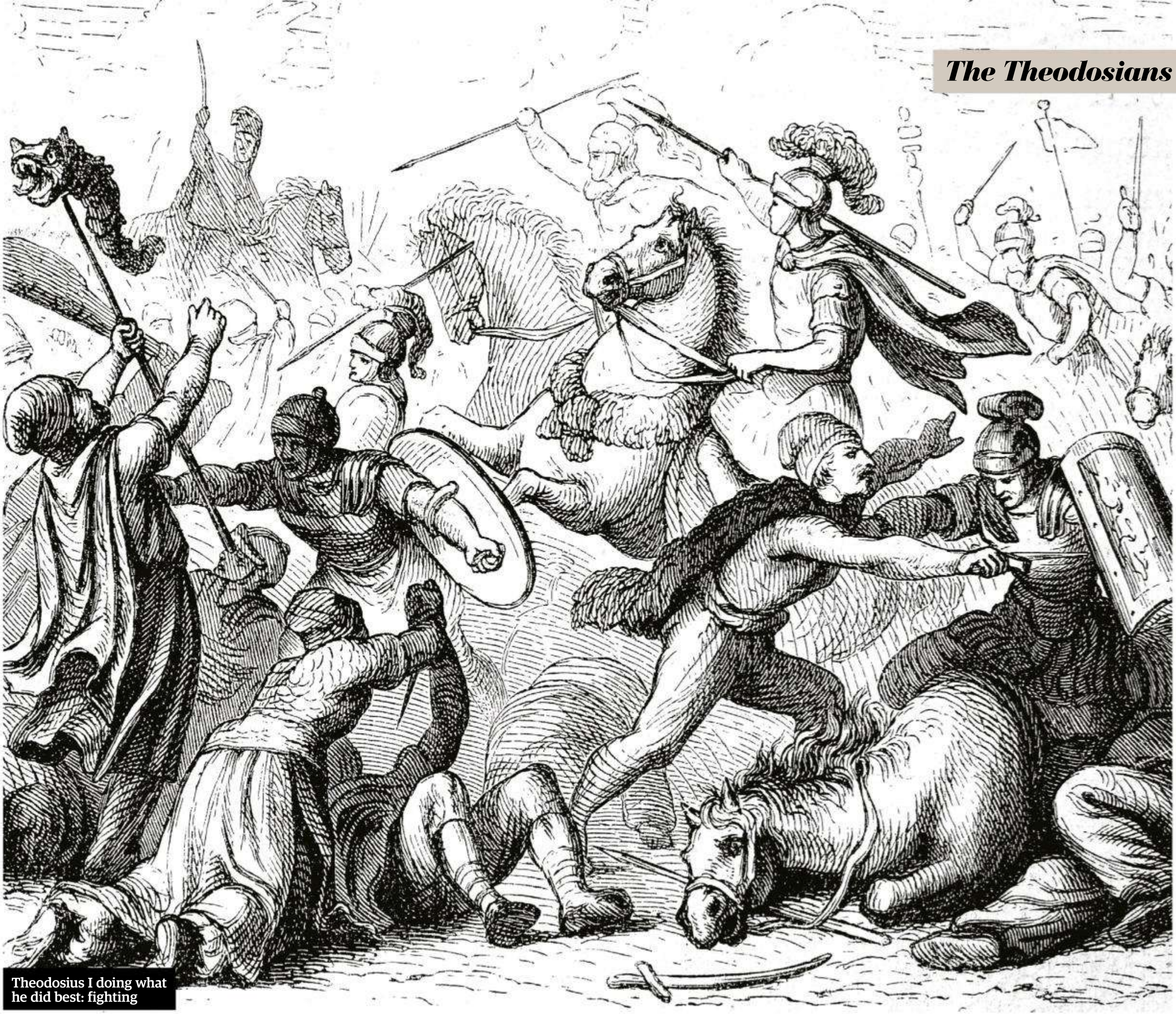
Dates ruled: 408 – 450
Area ruled: Eastern Roman Empire

The son of Arcadius, Theodosius would have been better suited to life as a scholar. He left running the empire to ministers and relatives, notably his sister, Pulcheria.

MARCIAN

Dates ruled: 450 – 457
Area ruled: Eastern Roman Empire

A Theodosian by virtue of marriage to Pulcheria, the sister of Theodosius II, Marcian was an able administrator who managed to keep the Eastern out of the chaos engulfing the Western Empire.



Theodosius I doing what he did best: fighting

> "Both boys proved entirely inadequate to the demands placed upon them: indeed the two young emperors only contributed to the stench of decay that had settled upon Rome"

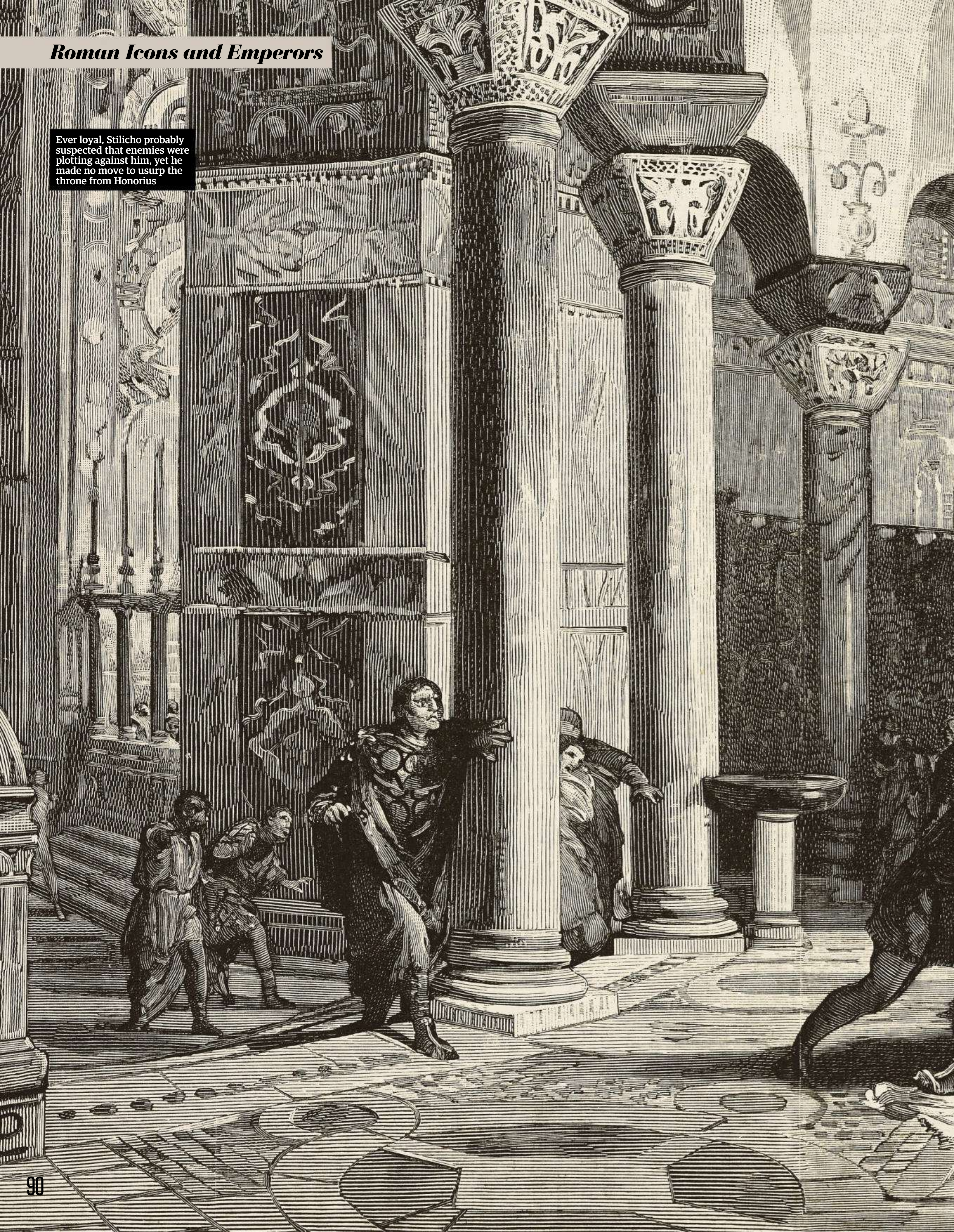
But of course, such was the sea of troubles afflicting the empire at the end of the 4th century that no sooner had one crisis been resolved than another one flared up. In 383 CE, there was rebellion in the West, where the usurper Magnus Maximus had killed the Western Augustus, Gratian, and installed himself in his place. It was five years before Theodosius was sufficiently confident of the security of the eastern border – he signed a peace treaty with the aggressive Sasanian Empire to ensure stability against the empire's most formidable foe – to move against Magnus Maximus. The emperor and the usurper met at the Battle of the Save in yet another conflict that bled the empire of its manpower in civil strife.

Theodosius won; the usurper never ascended to imperial legitimacy through victory but fell to ignominious execution. Theodosius was now de facto ruler of the whole empire – he would be the last emperor of both West and East. Having celebrated a triumph in Rome on 13 June 389 CE, and having stayed for two years in Milan where he installed a puppet Augustus of the West, Theodosius returned to Constantinople in November 391 CE.

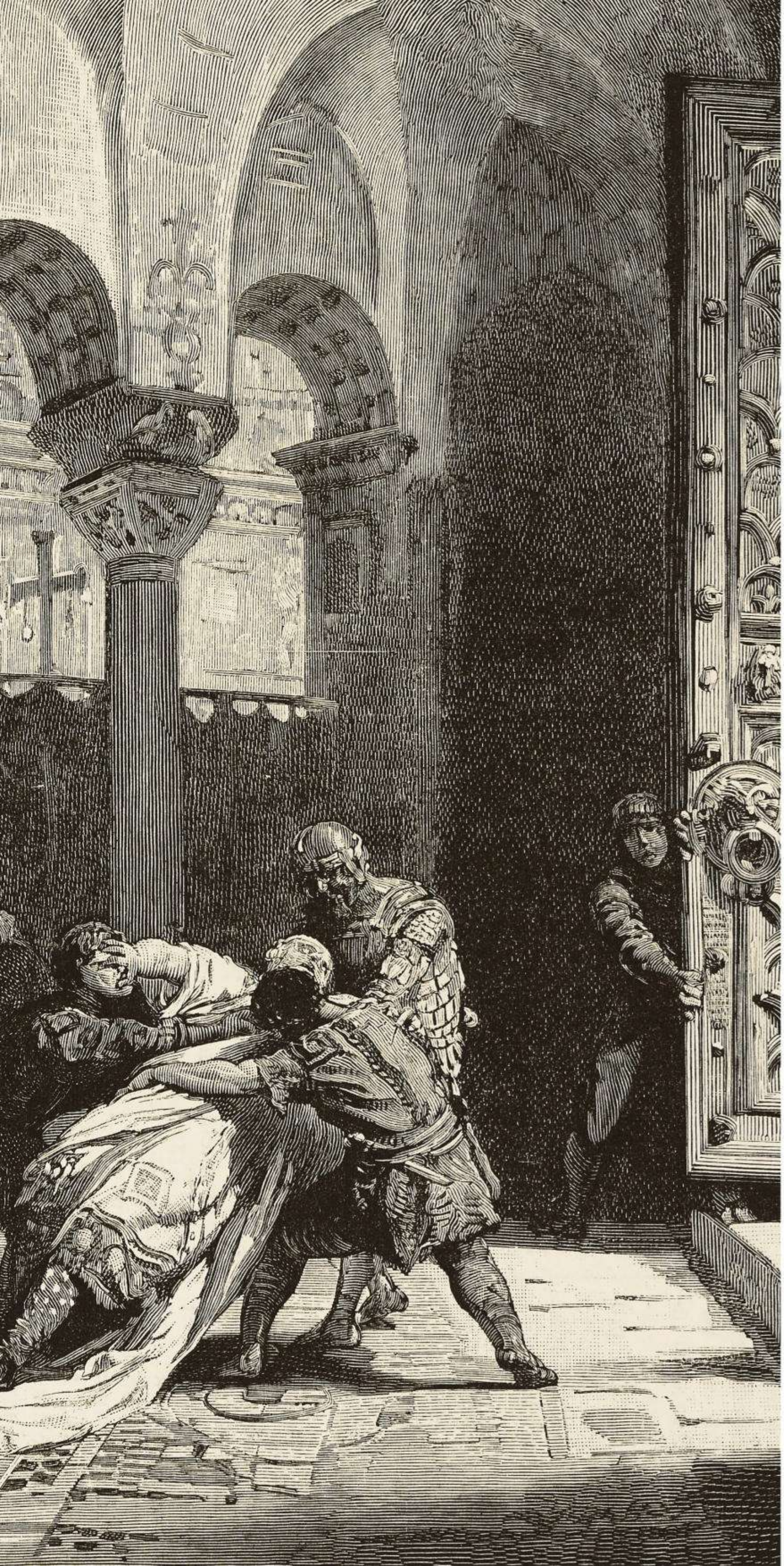
But in the emperor's absence, another usurper attempted to take the title of Augustus of the West. The empire was set for another bout of civil strife. Again, Theodosius took time assembling his forces. Among the commanders of his army was a barbarian named Stilicho, the son of a Vandal, who had risen through service in the Roman armies until he had attained such eminence that Theodosius had married his own niece to him.

The battle, when it came on 5 September 394, was initially disastrous for Theodosius and Stilicho, but they rallied their men and renewed the assault the next day, breaking the enemy's forces and killing the usurper. Not long after his victory, Theodosius fell ill and was taken to Milan, where he died on 17 January 395 CE. He was 48.

As heirs, he appointed his two sons, Arcadius, 18 years old and designated Augustus of the East, and Honorius, ten years old and the Augustus of the West. Unfortunately, both boys proved entirely inadequate to the demands placed upon them by an empire beset by enemies from without and dissension and decadence within: indeed, the two young emperors only contributed to the overwhelming stench of decay that had settled upon the rotting corpse of Rome.



Ever loyal, Stilicho probably suspected that enemies were plotting against him, yet he made no move to usurp the throne from Honorius



While his sons proved incompetent, Theodosius nonetheless possessed the foresight to appoint his most competent general, Stilicho, as guardian to Honorius. While the Augustus of the West was still a minor, Stilicho assumed the rank of magister militum, or master of soldiers, and, to safeguard his position, he married his daughter to Honorius. He then set about defending the empire from its myriad enemies, external and internal, with extraordinary vigour.

By the end of the 4th century, the Roman army was a shadow of its former self: a legion was now composed of 1,000 men rather than the original 6,000. To mount an effective defence against the multiple threats he faced, Stilicho had to move his field forces at speed around the West, at one point even sending a commander over to Africa to put down a rebellion there.

There were barbarian incursions from all sides Of these, the most dangerous were the repeated attacks led by Alaric, king of the Goths. Stilicho managed to defeat him twice, but the barbarian king escaped both times. But then in 405, a huge invasion of Ostrogoths swept down into Italy. Drawing every available man into his forces – Stilicho even promised slaves freedom in return for military service – the general defeated the barbarians in battle and then, cutting off their supplies, destroyed the invasion. However, this defence of Italy had left the Rhine frontier open.

During the winter of 406-07, the river froze. On 31 December 406, taking advantage of this ice bridge, a loose coalition of Vandals, Alans and other tribes poured over the border, devastating Gaul and triggering military revolts in Britain. Taking advantage of the situation, Alaric threatened another invasion by his Goths. Stilicho persuaded the Senate to buy time, literally. It cost 4,000 pounds of gold to buy off Alaric. The rich of the empire grumbled at the cost, and court plotters, seeing Stilicho's prestige weakened, started whispering sedition in the credulous ear of Emperor Honorius. A weak man, Honorius summoned Stilicho to Ravenna, where the emperor had set up court in a city protected by marshes, and put the general to death on 22 August 408.

A year later, Alaric was camped outside Rome. The city, brought to near starvation, bought him off again. Honorius, twisting on the wiles of whichever minister had his ear, tried to alternately buy off, outface and outmanoeuvre Alaric, only for the infuriated king to order his men to sack Rome. It was 24 August 410. It had been 800 years since Rome had been last occupied by its enemies. The shock reverberated around the world.

Honorius clung to power for a further 15 years. But when he died of natural causes, Britain, Spain and much of Gaul were no longer under Roman control. The empire was being dismembered. Rome had not yet fallen, but it was tottering.

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Ancient Roman Religion

The Romans ruled an empire, but they were ruled by a pantheon of gods who controlled every aspect of their lives

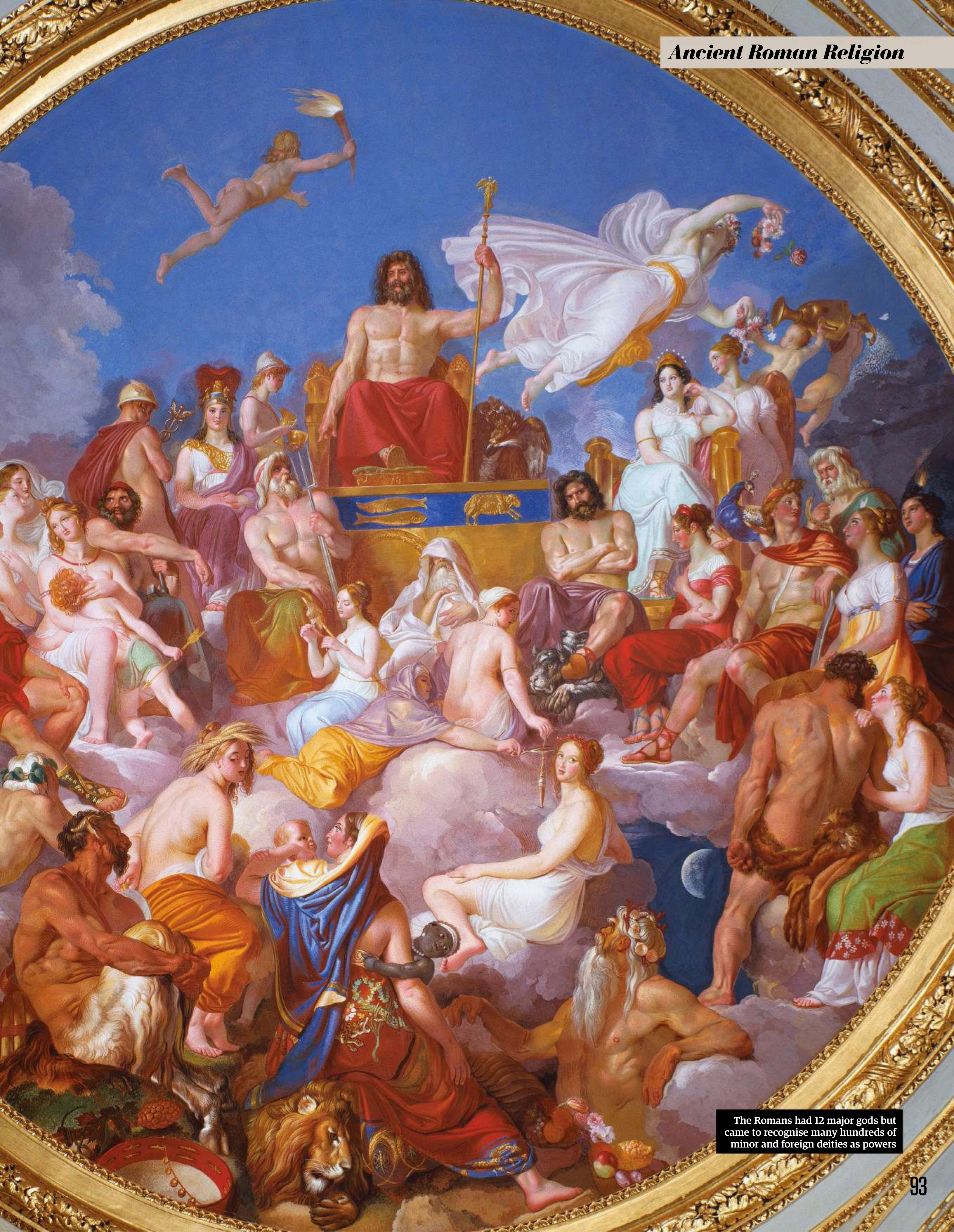
The Roman mind was an odd one; hard-nosed pragmatism was meshed with deeply held superstition. While the legions of the empire marched across the world, people felt that the might of Rome was supported not so much by their fearsome military prowess but by the good will of the gods. It is impossible to understand Rome without knowledge of their pre-Christian faith.

The foundational myth of Rome shows the importance they placed on divine signs. When Romulus and Remus wanted to found a city they marked out the sky and waited for the gods to send them a message. Remus saw six eagles, but Romulus saw a full dozen and that is why we study 'Roman' paganism and not 'Reman'. The ancient gods worshipped by the Romans were all clearly and closely related to the deities of the Greek world. Zeus the Father (Zeus Pater) of the Greeks morphed into Jupiter of the Romans while maintaining his role as king of heaven. There is some evidence that both Zeus and Jupiter developed from earlier Proto-Indo-European gods but others were absorbed into the pantheon within historical memory.

Italy was once home to many colonies sent out by Greek city-states. These held on to the gods of the cities that had founded them. As Rome expanded its influence by conquest, these cities entered into the Roman world and their gods became the gods of Rome. Diana, Minerva, Venus, and Hercules are all thought to have become Roman deities in this way.

Before these additions had been made, Roman paganism was influenced by that of the Etruscans. The Etruscans pre-dated Rome and controlled a large area of land bordering Rome in the 9th-6th centuries BCE. By the time Rome absorbed the final Etruscan cities it had long before taken up many of their religious practices. The Etruscans studied nature for signs of the gods' instructions. Haruspices were priests who used the entrails of sacrificial animals to read the will of heaven. The practically minded Romans would continue to use this method to predict auguries of the future for centuries to come.

Roman paganism in its purest form of around 100 BCE was already therefore a religion of borrowings. While there were proud noble families



The Romans had 12 major gods but came to recognise many hundreds of minor and foreign deities as powers who looked down on 'foreign' faiths, even the haughtiest would have had to admit that gods had long been imported to the city. In 217 BCE, Italy was being ravaged by Hannibal and his army. Against the warnings of priests, the Romans met Hannibal in battle at Lake Trasimene and they suffered one of the worst defeats in history. Clearly the gods had not been on the side of Rome. Consulting the sacred Sibylline Texts it was decided that Rome would have to bring Venus of Eryx, a city on Sicily, to Rome. The Romans offered this goddess a huge bribe and a temple in the heart of Rome if only she would relocate. The image of the goddess was transferred to Rome and the worship of Venus Erycina inaugurated. Rome went on to defeat Hannibal.

Mithras

At sites across the Roman Empire, strange monuments have been found underground. In domed caves, statues depict a young man in the act of slaying a bull. Known as the Tauroctony, these sculptures are the remains of the cult of a god known as Mithras.

Mithraism was just one of many mystery cults that flourished during the Roman Empire. These cults were often foreign imports that offered followers access to secrets hidden from outsiders. Some promised to reveal the secrets of the afterlife. We know very little of what the followers of Mithras believed, but some clues are found in his temples.

Mithras is sometimes shown as being born from a rock, dining with the god Sol, or with a lion-headed figure surrounded by snakes. The central image of the temple is always the bull slaying, but nothing is known of the meaning of the act. We do know that Mithras worshippers called themselves 'syndexioi' – those who shake hands. Perhaps the secret of Mithras was in the bonds formed between followers. The cult was popular among soldiers and persisted until the 4th century CE, when it was suppressed as a rival faith to Christianity.

© Scazon

The tauroctony (bull slaying) was the focus of worship in Mithraism and echoed the tradition of animal sacrifice that is found in mainstream Roman paganism

Prayer for a Roman was not a quiet act of contemplation allowing communion between the worshipper and the worshipped. Roman religion was performative. Worship was loud, colourful and smelly. A Roman temple was the scene of chanting, gaudily painted images of the gods, and the bloody sacrifice of animals. For the gods to be propitiated, they had to be seen to be offered something good by the people.

There is some evidence that human sacrifice may once have played a role in Roman paganism. In one legend, after an earthquake opened a chasm in the forum of Rome, it was feared that the gods were displeased. The city was told to offer its most precious item to the pit to placate the gods. Marcus Curtius put on his battle armour, mounted his horse, and leapt into the hole, declaring that bravery was the most valuable possession of the Romans. The chasm closed over him and Rome was saved. Some believe that gladiatorial battles were originally funerary rites with the dead fighters as offerings to the deceased.

If humans were once offered to the gods, by the time of the Roman Empire it was animals that took up the burden of placating them. Sheep, pigs and cows were often slaughtered. The victim was supposed to be willingly killed, so attempts were made to keep it calm before a priest stunned it with a hammer and slit its throat. After the sacrifice, feasts were held at which the gods, in the form of their sacred images, would have been present. A portion of the sacrificial beast was burned so that the gods could enjoy their offering through the smoke while their followers feasted.

Sacrifices could be small affairs to bless a family or huge offerings to save the city. In order to survive in the war against Hannibal, Rome offered Jupiter every single animal born that spring. For those unable to afford a bull, it was also appropriate to give the gods a drink of wine, a bunch of grapes or honey cake. Not all the services of the gods were large enough to require a whole ceremony.

In a polytheist pantheon, there is always room for another deity. Within a Roman home there would be a small shrine to those gods that were specially honoured within the household. The Lares Familiares and Penates were gods with a

> "Prayer for a Roman was not a quiet act of contemplation"

special role within the household. The Penates took care of the family who owned the home. Every time the family dined, a small portion would be offered to a fire to include the Penate in the meal. The Lares Familiares were responsible not only for the family but for everyone, including slaves, who lived within the house.

Some found the number of deities bemusing. Saint Augustine, a hostile witness on paganism, mocked the littleness of some Roman gods. He records how Cardea watched hinges, Forculus guarded doors, and Limentinus was responsible for thresholds. Augustine wondered how it could be that one human guard was enough to watch a doorway when three gods were required. In more vital areas like the harvesting of corn, he lists ten gods who have a role in the various stages of the crop's development and growth.

Paganism's ability to add new gods offered Roman emperors a unique political opportunity. Romans were used to worshipping figures that had once been mortal. Romulus himself is said to have mysteriously disappeared into heaven. It was even accepted that some people had divine ancestry. Aeneas, founder of Rome, was the son of Venus and through him Julius Caesar was able to claim to be the descendent of a goddess. Caesar was honoured by some as a living god and a house built for him at the state's expense was shaped like a temple. Statues were set up to Caesar as a divinity. Unfortunately Julius' flesh was not as impervious to daggers as his statues.

© Enrique Íñiguez Rodríguez

Animals were messengers between humans and the divine and feature in heavily in Roman myth, like the wolf that fed Romulus and Remus

When Caesar was murdered, he was officially declared a god. This allowed his adopted son Augustus to call himself *Divi Filius* - Son of God. Augustus itself was a name he chose for its religious associations. He allowed citizens outside of Italy to build temples in his honour but, perhaps remembering the fate of his uncle, forbade it at Rome. When sailors from Alexandria offered him divine honours, he was pleased. They claimed it was through him that they were able to sail the seas in peace, trade, and had liberty.

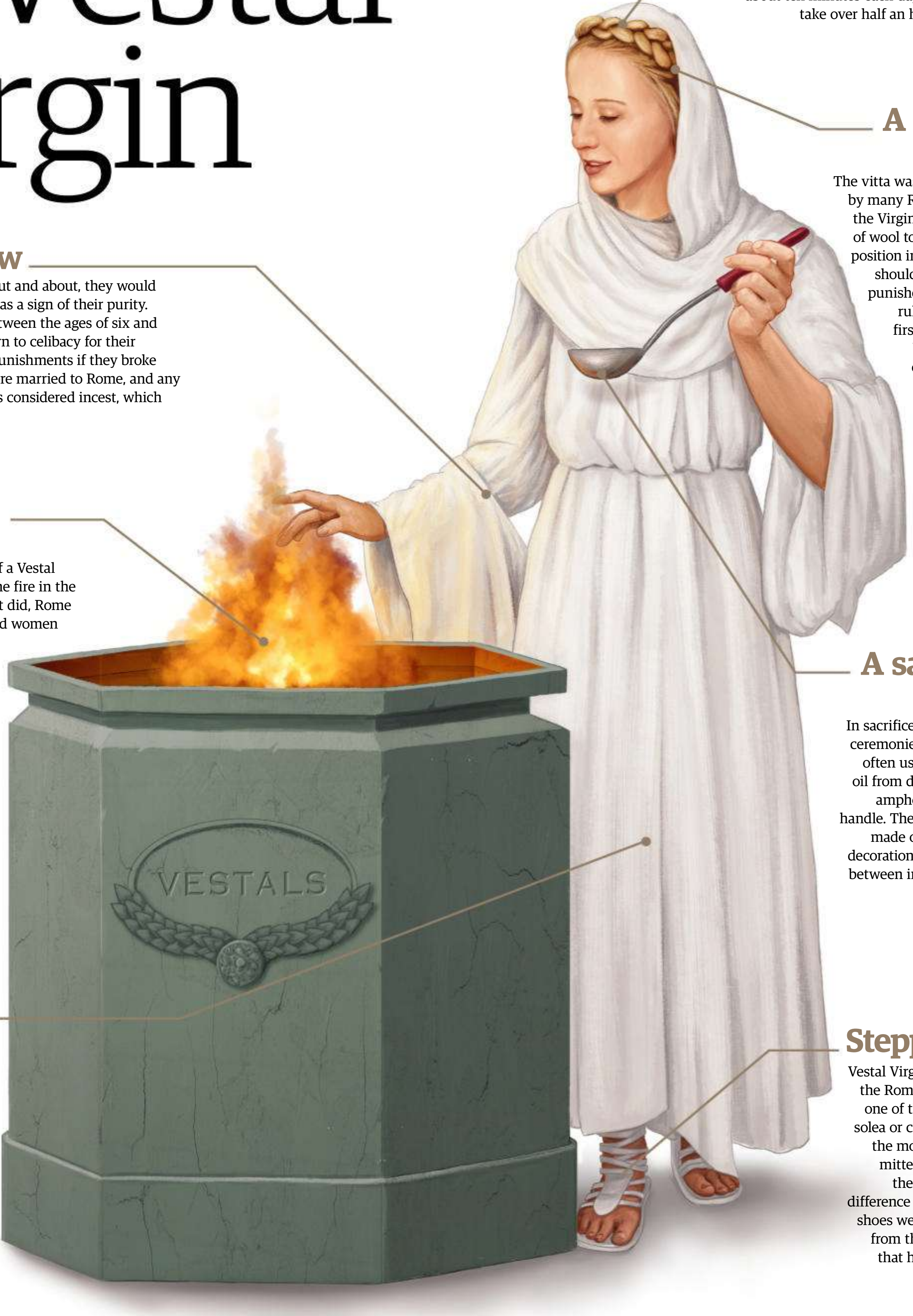
This is the practical Roman definition of a deity - a being able to render aid to worshippers. Augustus was therefore a god worth worshipping. On his death, a senator saw an eagle rise from the funeral pyre and so it was decided Augustus would be honoured in Rome, too. Many of his successors as emperor followed him into the sky as they died. The emperor Vespasian even mocked the imperial cult on his deathbed. "Alas," he said, "I fear I am becoming a god."

The fall of paganism in Rome was tied to the imperial family. Constantine was the first emperor to make Christianity legal in the empire and over time pagan symbols, including the statue of Victory in the Senate house, were removed. Emperor Julian (known by Christians as Julian the Apostate) was the last pagan emperor, coming to the purple after the rise of Christianity, but despite his efforts to restore the worship of Rome's older gods alongside the newer faiths, his short reign was unable to bring back religious toleration. After his death in battle, supposedly saying "You have won, Galilean," the Roman world became ever more, and finally exclusively, Christian.

© Getty.

Rome, Unknown – 394 CE

A Vestal Virgin



Pure as snow

If you saw a Vestal Virgin out and about, they would always be dressed in white as a sign of their purity. Chosen when they were between the ages of six and ten, the girls would be sworn to celibacy for their 30-year stint, with severe punishments if they broke their sacred vows – they were married to Rome, and any dalliances with citizens was considered incest, which was punishable by death.

The eternal flame

The most important duty of a Vestal Virgin was to ensure that the fire in the temple never went out – if it did, Rome would fall. With six girls and women serving at a time, they took shifts to watch over it and if the flame was extinguished, whichever Vestal Virgin was on duty would be stripped and scourged by the pontifex maximus, who was usually the emperor.

Dress to impress

A stola formed the main undergarment for the Vestal Virgins, but over the top of this they wore a stophium made of white linen. On many occasions they also wore a cloak, or palla. These had to be very simple as they had to display themselves with the utmost decorum.

The braiding bunch

The Vestal Virgins often wore their hair in complicated braids. With the hair divided into sections, six plaits would be made in each, which would then be wound intricately together around the head. With two or more slaves doing the work, this would have taken about ten minutes each day, although it could take over half an hour with only one.

A woollen symbol

The vitta was a headband worn by many Roman women, but the Virgins' ones were made of wool to show their higher position in society. However, should a Vestal Virgin be punished for breaking the rules, it would be the first thing they would be stripped of. The ceremonial version of this was called an infula. The veil they sometimes wore was called a suffibulum.

A sacrificial ladle

In sacrifices or other religious ceremonies, a simpulum was often used to draw wine or oil from deep containers like amphorae, hence its long handle. These tools were often made of bronze, and their decoration could be anything between incredibly plain and beautifully ornate.

Stepping out

Vestal Virgins, like the rest of the Romans, typically wore one of three types of shoe: solea or calceus, which were the most common, or the mitten sandal. However, there was one distinct difference in that the Virgins' shoes were white and made from the skins of animals that had been sacrificed.

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Rome's Big Twelve

Meet the gods and goddesses worshipped, revered and feared by the Romans

Juno

More than just Jupiter's wife

If you were a woman in Ancient Rome, especially a married one, Juno was your goddess as she kept an eye over all aspects of women's lives. She even enjoyed her own festival, the Matronalia, on 1 March each year during which husbands gave gifts to their wives during a time of renewal and the reawakening of nature. In one of her many guises, Juno was also tasked with overseeing childbirth as Juno Lucina, and a temple was dedicated to this version of her on the Esquiline Hill. Juno has the privilege of being one of the oldest Roman gods as one of the three originals – the Capitoline Triad – alongside her brother and husband Jupiter, and Minerva, all three of whom were adopted into the Roman pantheon from the Etruscans. As the centuries went by, her status grew ever larger and her cult expanded until she was recognised as the principal female divinity of the state, rightfully sitting alongside Jupiter.

Jupiter

The one who reigned supreme

Above the multitude of other gods and goddesses in the Ancient Roman pantheon sat the mighty Jupiter. With his grand throne and eagle-topped sceptre, he was the man in charge, the deity whose duty it was to watch over every single Roman citizen.

In a religion where every god was in charge of something, Jupiter's domain was the sky and everything that went with it. On overcast days he was known to blow the clouds away, and he would smite those who wronged him with his crashing thunderbolts in his fits of rage.

Jupiter's grandest temple sat on the Capitoline Hill and was dedicated to Jupiter Optimus Maximus – literally the best and greatest. It was here that generals and emperors would parade to during their triumphs to display their spoils from their victorious campaigns all over the empire and beyond. While he was a regal being, he was also known for his sexual transgressions, despite his marriage to his sister Juno. He managed to find his way into the beds of many a mortal woman, often fathering children like Hercules, Mercury, Bacchus and more.

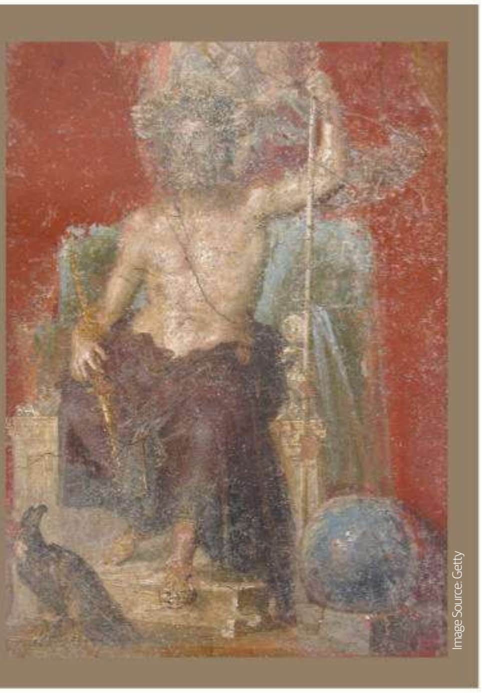


Image Source: Getty

Venus

Love and motherhood fell under the domain of Cupid's mother

When Saturn castrated his father and his blood fell into the sea, a new goddess rose from the sea foam: Venus. As she was the deity in charge of love, sex, beauty, fertility and prostitution, it seems like a somewhat ironic birth. Venus didn't discriminate when it came to sexual partners – she would take both mortals and immortals as lovers. In the former category fell Vulcan and Mars, and she had many divine children with the latter including the Cupids. Her mortal lovers were Anchises, Adonis and the Sicilian king Butes. The first temple we know about that was dedicated to Venus was on the Aventine Hill in 295 BCE, and her reputation only grew with temples dedicated to Venus the Mother and the Changer of Hearts appearing over time. The Romans didn't skimp on their festivals in her honour either, with Veneralia and Vinalia Urbana both being held in April, followed by Vinalia Rustica in August and Venus Genetrix in September.

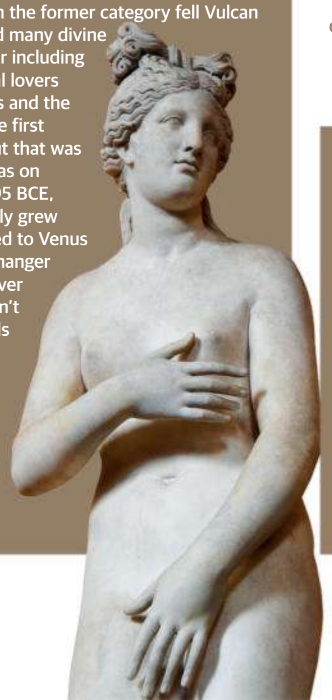


Image Source: Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin FRCP(Glasg)

Minerva

War wasn't just a man's game

One of the Capitoline Triad, Minerva was the goddess of many aspects of Roman life: wisdom, medicine, commerce, poetry, the arts, handicrafts and war. However, that last facet of her divinity was one that appeared over time, causing her to encroach upon Mars' domain ever more frequently. In fact, she eventually took over the Quinquatrus festival, a five-day celebration that signalled the start of the army's campaign season, from her half-brother. As well as war, Minerva would build a reputation throughout the Roman Republic as a deity of victory, and Pompey dedicated a temple to her after his successful campaigns in the east. Minerva boasted a shrine on Rome's Aventine Hill, built in 263 or 262 BCE, which became a meeting place for guilds of craftsmen in the city. There was also another shrine dedicated to her on the Caelian Hill, and a temple was built in her name in the Nerva Forum by the emperor Domitian, who claimed that the goddess was protecting him.

Neptune

A fisherman's friend, this god watched over the seas

In the ancient Mediterranean, the sea provided the fastest mode of transport – making sacrifices to its deity was of utmost importance. For the Romans, this happened to be Neptune, brother of Jupiter and Pluto. Originally known as the god of freshwater rivers, lakes and streams, after the adoption of the Greek pantheon in the 4th-3rd centuries BCE he became inextricably intertwined with his Grecian counterpart, Poseidon. He took on the three-pronged trident and often appeared with the dolphins that had been associated with Poseidon.

Neptune also enjoyed his own festival each summer, Neptunalia, which was marked with games. However, not much else is known about the event. The god was also worshipped across Rome's vast territories. Married to a sea nymph by the name of Amphitrite, Neptune had a son, Triton, who was half man, half fish. He was also the father of Pegasus, the infamous winged horse.

Mars

The protector and warrior who looked after Rome

In a civilisation built through battle and conquest, a god of war was always going to sit high in the pantheon – Mars was second only to Jupiter. Often modelled on his Greek counterpart, Ares, Mars did have some more Roman attributes that separated him from the Greek god; namely that he was more levelheaded, and more virtuous.

Considered by some to be the father of the twins Romulus and Remus, Mars was often looked at as the protector of Rome and the Roman way of life, defending the Eternal City's borders and keeping the enemy at bay. Festivals in his honour were held in March, which was named 'Martius' after him, and October, two months that bookended the Roman military season.

March would see Equirria, which ensured that horses would be well when on campaign, along with Feriae Marti, Agonium Martiale and Tubilustrium. October played host to the Armilustrium festival on the Aventine, which saw weapons be purified before they were stored away for the winter.

Diana

If you go out to the woods, you're probably praying to Diana

There's a chance that she was an Italic woodland deity before the influence of the Greek pantheon, but the Roman Diana became inextricably linked with Artemis fairly early on. Her domain focused on animals, both wild and domestic, and the hunt, but she was also a fertility goddess who was invoked to aid conception and birth. Diana was also considered a protector of Rome's lower classes and slaves, with her festival day – 13 August, the Ides of the month – being a holiday for the latter. Today, the most famous place of worship associated with Diana is the sacred grove of Diana Nemorensis, or Diana of the Wood, on the shores of Lake Nemi about an hour outside of Rome. She also had her own temple on the Aventine in the city, which was home to the foundation charter of the Latin League that apparently dated back to the 6th century BCE.

Mercury

The winged messenger god

In 495 BCE, a new god came to Rome. Mercury was the deity of shopkeepers, travellers, transporters of goods, thieves and tricksters, and his brand new temple on the Aventine Hill was open for business. He shared it with his mother, Maia, who also featured in his festival, Mercuralia, every 15 May, the supposed anniversary of the temple's dedication. When it came to depicting Mercury, many drew their inspiration from his Greek equivalent, Hermes, giving him winged sandals or a winged cap. Others gave him a bag in which to carry the goods he was transporting, or a type of wand that was used to reconcile conflicts. Mercury crops up quite a lot in ancient stories – in Virgil's *Aeneid*, it is he who reminded Aeneas that he needed to leave Dido to continue on his journey to found Rome, and he also makes a few appearances in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, making visits to mortals as he was known to do.

Image Source: Augustin Pajou

Ceres

When collecting the harvest, make sure to send up a prayer to this goddess

While most gods only came to help mortals if they deemed them special or worthy, Ceres showed no favouritism. Every day, the goddess of agriculture and grain would nurture mankind, and she taught humans how to grow, preserve and prepare grain and corn. She was kind and benevolent, ready to help anyone who asked, unlike her brother, Jupiter, and an idiom was born from this – 'fit for Ceres' meant that something was brilliant or splendid.

Boasting a temple on the Aventine Hill in Rome, Ceres also had a festival, the Cerealia, held on 19 April each year. However, this temple, built around 496 BCE, suffered extensive fire damage in 31 BCE. Knowing its importance, the emperor Augustus made sure that it was rebuilt. It became a religious and political centre among the lower classes, and even became known for the splendour of the works of art displayed there.

Vesta

A goddess reserved for women

A round temple sat in the forum in the centre of Rome, and it contained a fire. If this flame should ever go out, it would mean disaster for Rome, so it was left under the care of the followers of Vesta. She was the goddess of the hearth fire – and the patron deity of bakers – so the connection is clear. Vesta's festival, Vestalia, was held every year on 7-15 June, and it was only at this time that women could enter the innermost sanctuary of her temples.

Usually depicted as a woman draped head to toe in fabric and often with her trusty ass by her side, Vesta found her way into the homes of ordinary Romans, often appearing on household shrines alongside the Penates and Lares.

Vesta was also the goddess of marriage, and it's through her that the tradition of new brides not stepping over the threshold has come to be.

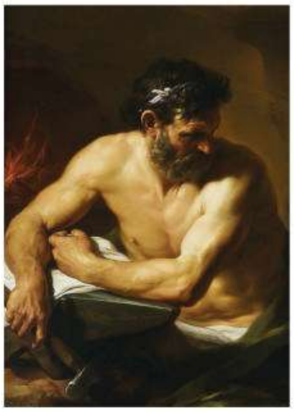
Being one of the Vestal Virgins – a priestess in her cult – would also grant women privileges like a front row seat at the theatre instead of being relegated to the back of the audience. Life wasn't all great for the priestesses, though. Any thought to have broken their vow of chastity would be buried alive; their purity was linked to the safety and prosperity of Rome.

While the Vestal Virgins were highly venerated in Roman society, they were disbanded in 394 CE by Emperor Theodosius. The last high priestess was Coelia Concordia, who stepped down in that year.

Vulcan

Don't stand too near a volcano if this god gets angry

Vulcan wasn't known for being a looker – in fact, he'd been so unattractive when he cried as a baby that his mother, Juno, had thrown him from the heavens. The fall left him with a limp for the rest of his life. However, this worked out pretty well for him in the long run – it was how he eventually met Venus, ironically the goddess of beauty, who then became his bride, although their relationship wasn't exactly smooth-sailing; the legend goes that whenever Venus had an affair, Vulcan's anger would cause a volcano to erupt. The god of fire, Vulcan's festival day was 23 August, which saw the Vulcanalia celebration. He was also the blacksmith of the gods, and because of his power over destructive fire, his temples were usually located outside of cities, just in case.



Image

Apollo

A Greek deity turned Roman

Sometimes Roman gods were pretty much carbon copies of their Greek counterparts, and Apollo certainly fell into that category. The deity of the Sun, healing and prophecy, among others, was a son of Jupiter and the twin brother of Diana, and the first temple dedicated to him in Rome was built near the Theatre of Marcellus in the 5th century BCE for Apollo Medicus, or Apollo the Healer, as the city was ravaged by plague.

Apollo did enjoy one thing that most other gods didn't – he had an oracle at Delphi. People from all around the Mediterranean came to seek his advice through his mouthpiece, the Pythia – the high priestess of the temple – and this continued from the Greek era through to the Romans as control passed to them in 191 BCE.

The sanctuary remained through the Roman Empire, maintaining its importance, and special games, known as the Pythian Games, started in the 6th century BCE and were held there for centuries. These events took places two years after the Olympic Games, and included competitions for art and dance.

Finally, in 393 CE, it was time for Delphi's demise. Emperor Theodosius demanded that all pagan sanctuaries be closed, and Delphi's importance faded away along with the Roman gods.

Image Source: Belmonte77

Dining Deities and Spirits of the Pantry

Gods, temples and household spirits; just what did religion look like to the Romans on a daily basis?

Strange as it may seem to us today, to the people of Ancient Rome, religion was of utmost importance, forming an integral and vital part of every day life. The gods controlled everything that happened to an individual and the nation as a whole, with the actions of these often volatile deities used to explain events that occurred, both good and bad. It is hardly surprising, therefore, to find that a great deal of time and energy was spent on religious practice by the Romans: from slaves to the emperors and everyone in between.

Rome as a whole congratulated itself on high levels of collective piety, believing that this, coupled with a talent for appeasing the gods and keeping them on their side, were to thank for the great successes of the ever-expanding empire. Being a polytheistic society from the start, there were a lot of gods and goddesses to be kept happy, and a lot of hard work needed to maintain the status quo. The consequences of angering the gods and losing favour was not something an individual or Rome could contemplate. Just how, then, did they go about keeping this delicate balance?

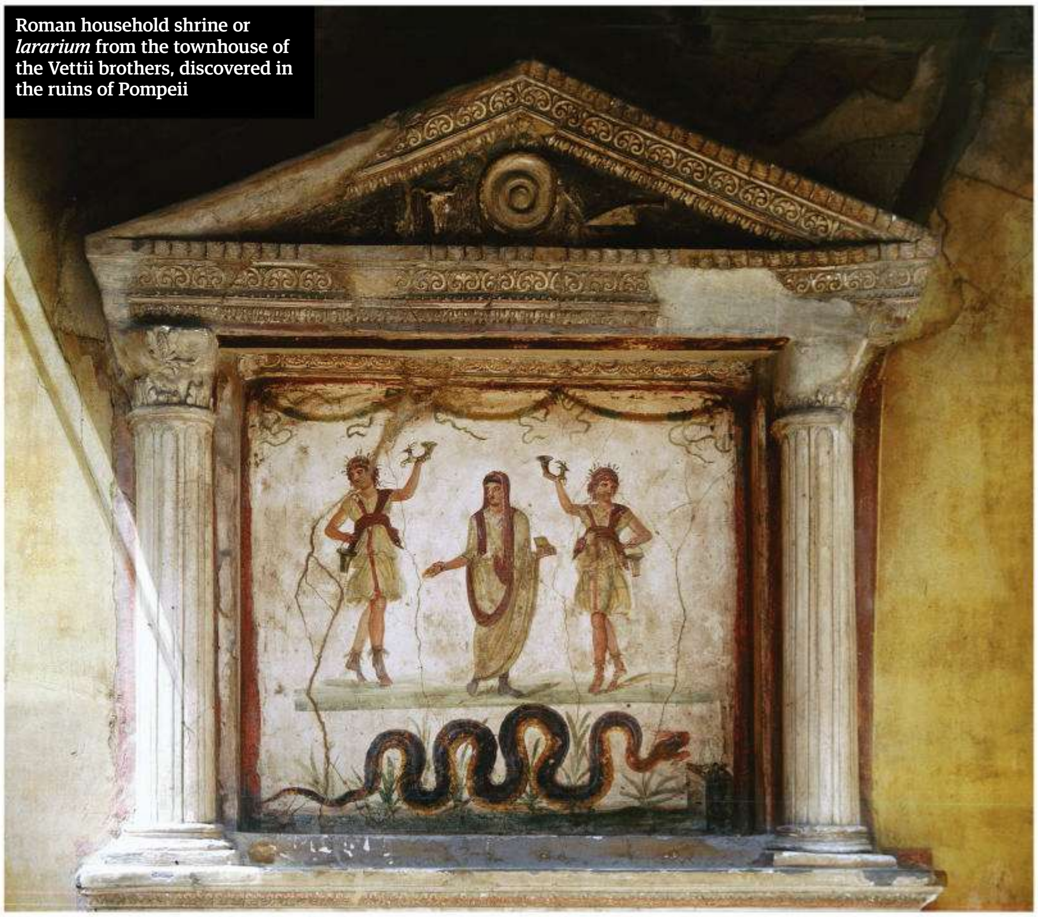
With religion pervading every aspect of daily life in Ancient Rome, it makes sense that religious observance began at that vital centre of Roman culture and experience: the family. Private worship within the home, therefore, was the foundation of all Roman religious life, the pietas or piety that contributed collectively to the wellbeing of the empire having its roots in the private religious devotions of each family.

Evidence of Roman religion still exists in Britain today: St Paul's Cathedral was built on the site of a temple to Diana

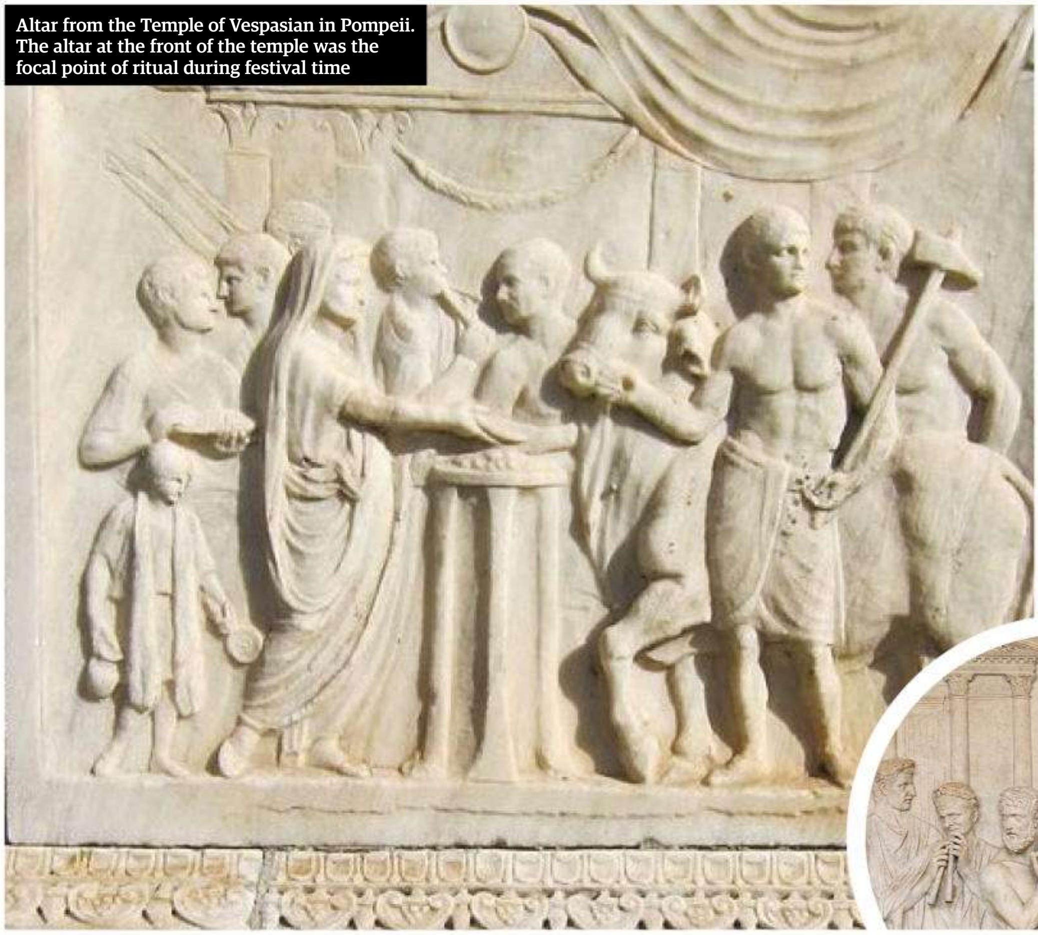
Each household had its own shrine, dedicated to the gods that were of importance to those who

"Religious observance began at that vital centre of Roman culture and experience: the family"

The Temple of Saturn looms majestically over the forum in Rome, which some believe is the birthplace of western civilisation



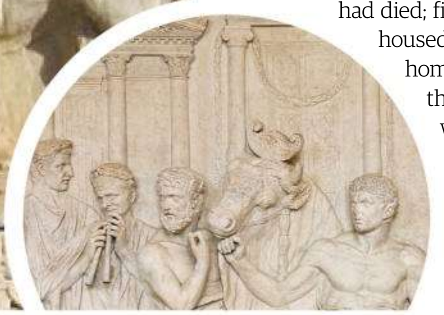
Roman household shrine or *lararium* from the townhouse of the Vettii brothers, discovered in the ruins of Pompeii

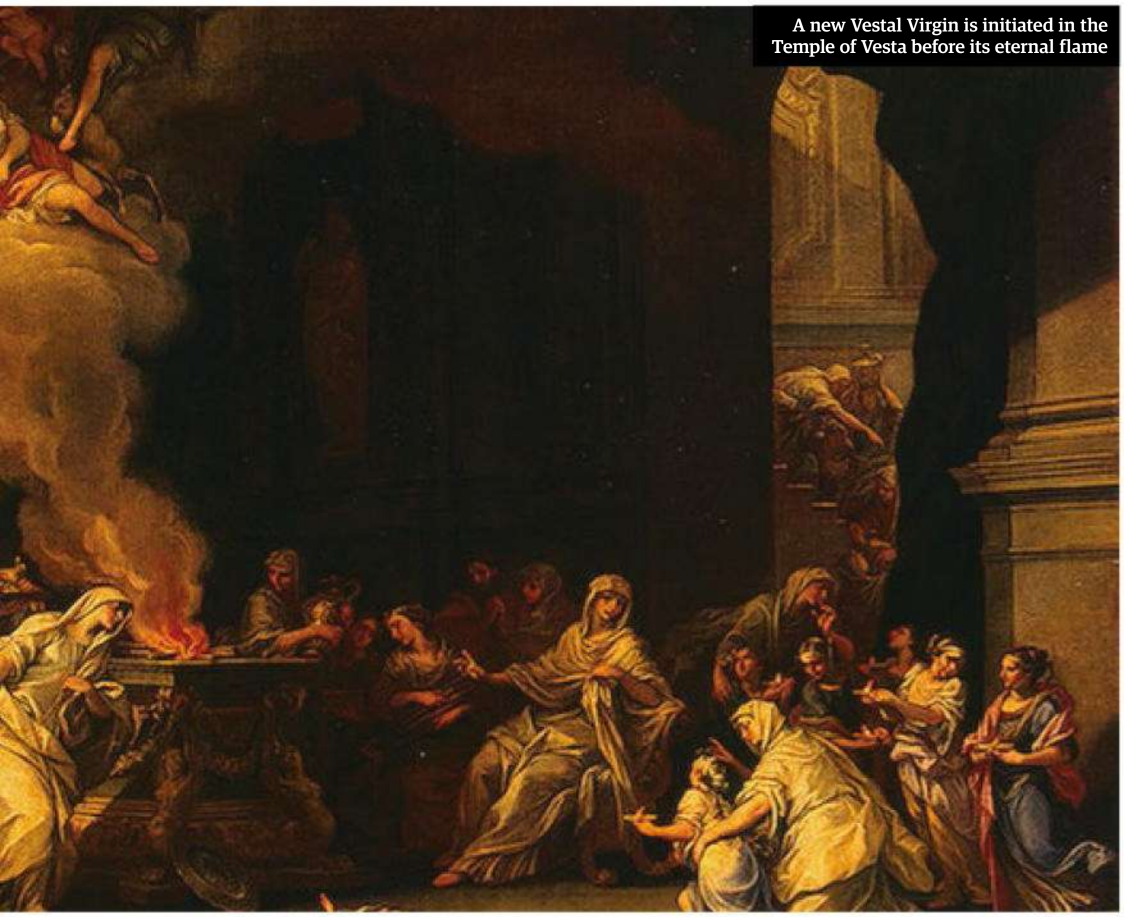


Altar from the Temple of Vespasian in Pompeii. The altar at the front of the temple was the focal point of ritual during festival time

lived there. The gods were far from distant figures to the Romans but were a very real and present feature in daily life. The head of the household was responsible for leading and guiding the rituals that took place, performing the role of a priest within the home. Figures of the gods would be placed on the shrine and, on special occasions, sacred meals were held in the god's name. It was believed that the god actually attended and participated in the meal and was treated as a guest of honour, with a place setting and food set out for them.

It was not just the gods that influenced daily lives; especially in the private sphere of the family, it was the spirits of the place and the home that were of greatest importance. These spirits were intimately connected to the household and the family within, and remembering to give them due honour and acknowledgment was crucial to a harmonious existence. There were various types of spirits within a home: lares were the spirits of either the place or of ancestors who had died; figures of these would be housed within a cupboard in the home and it was believed that they ensured the family did well as long as they were kept happy, often joining the family at mealtimes. Penates or panes (literally spirits of the pantry) were another vital spirit for the home, making sure that





A new Vestal Virgin is initiated in the Temple of Vesta before its eternal flame

food remained good and plentiful all year round. There were also less positive spirits that could be present within the house such as the lemures; these were spiteful spirits known to torment a home, and it was thought that lares could become this type of spirit if they felt aggrieved that they had not been accorded the proper respect that was due to them.

The other form of observance that was of vital importance in Roman religious life was public religious ritual. This took many forms and, unlike the religious worship of the household, the public worship of the empire was a far more controlled and formal affair, taking place in purpose-built temples that reflected the glory of Rome and her gods. Every town had at least one temple, while Rome itself had many, including the Temples of Jupiter, Vesta, Castor and Pollux, and Vespasian. Within the temples, the main 12 gods and goddesses of the Roman pantheon were worshipped, along with others who were considered important, such as Janus, Flora and Pluto. The location of the temples further highlighted the importance of religious observance in Roman life, and they were found in places of prominence such as the forum as well as close to major roads.

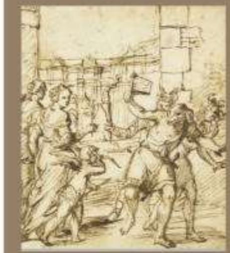
Within each temple, the image of the god or goddess to whom it was dedicated was located within the main room, or cella. Some temples were used to worship multiple gods, and in this case each god would have a separate cella dedicated in his or her name, containing an image of the relevant deity. It was believed that the god to which the temple was dedicated actually dwelt within the temple, the cella being a living place for the god, rather than purely symbolic. Depending on what a person's prayer was for would determine which temple or shrine they prayed at: for instance those who were praying regarding a matter related to war or battle would seek out a temple of Mars, while those

After the reign of Augustus, deceased emperors were given divine status and worshipped with other gods

> "The public worship of the empire was a far more controlled and formal affair, taking place in purpose-built temples"

Time to celebrate

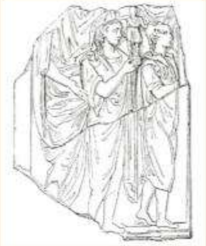
The people of Ancient Rome loved their festival days; these are just a selection of the many throughout the year



Lupercalia

A celebration of fertility

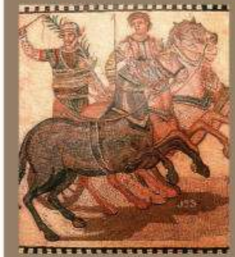
Held on 15 February. Dogs and goats were sacrificed in the cave of Romulus and Remus, and two teams of boys wearing goatskins were daubed with the blood. Then, carrying goatskin strips, the boys would run a set route, whipping spectators as they went. Women hoping to become pregnant would position themselves along the course so that they could be whipped as the runners passed.



Compitalia

To honour the *lares compitales*, household deities of the crossroads

One of the most important Roman festivals, it took place over three moveable days in late December or early January. Sacrifices were left at crossroads, and slaves could do what they wanted on those days. Wooden figures were placed on doorsteps to appease the lares and ask them to spare those within.



Consualia

Feast of Consus, the granary god

Taking place during August, the first fruits of the harvest would be sacrificed to Consus on his newly cleaned alter, presided over by the Pontifex Maximus and the Vestal Virgins. Chariot races and games were held to honour Consus, and working animals were given the day off.

Feriae Ancillarum

Feast of the serving women

Said to be held on 7 July, this festival remembers when the Romans beat the Latin army through a serving girl named Philotis and a burning fig tree. In commemoration, the female slaves of Rome would dress in their finest clothes and attack freeborn men with fig tree branches.

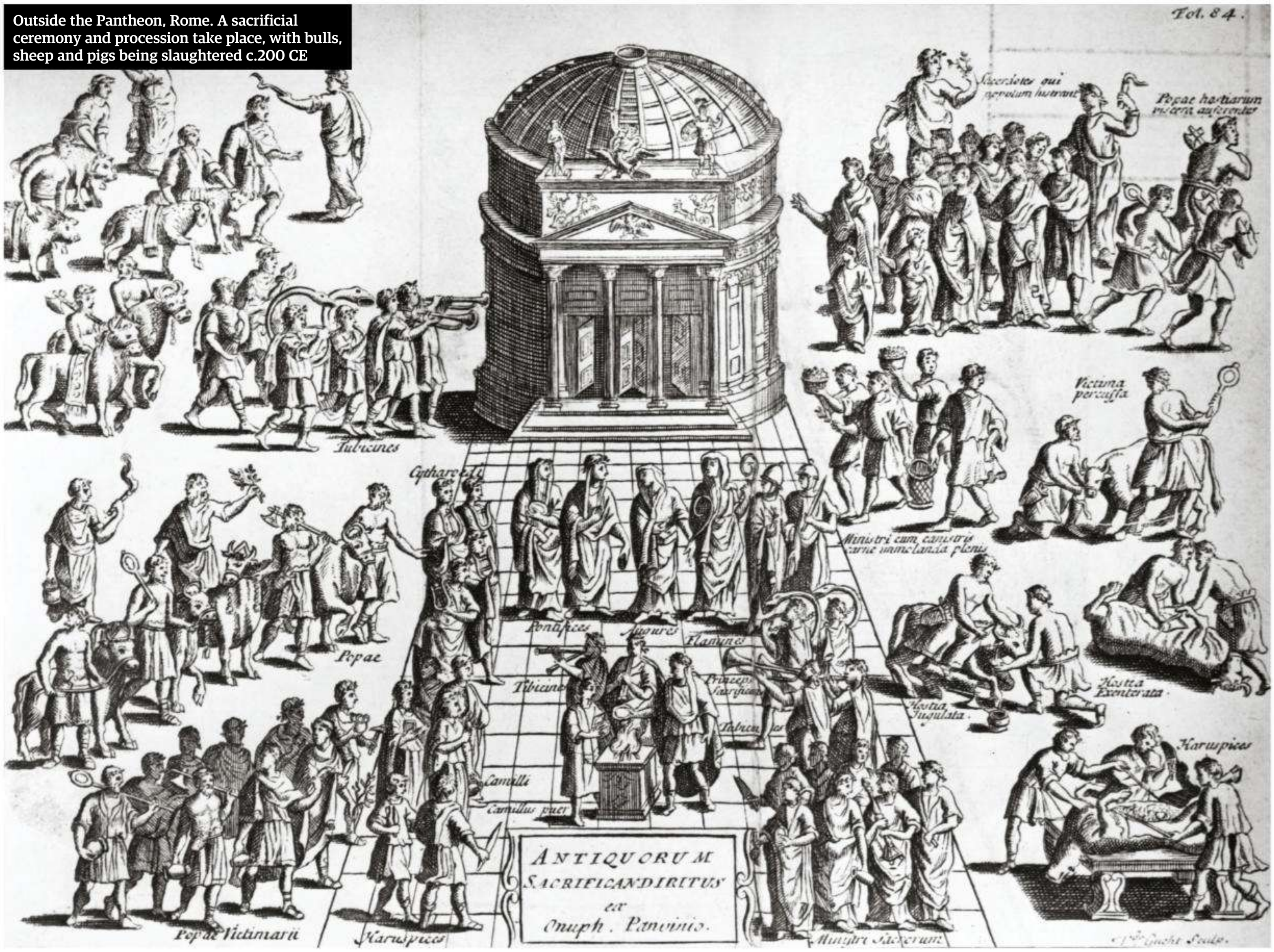
To make a sacrifice

Sacrifice was an important part of Roman religious observance, in particular in the grand spectacle of public worship in Rome. Animals were the main choice, with different animals sacrificed to different gods; a heifer would suffice for Jupiter, but greedy Mars wanted a sheep, pig and an ox before he would consent to bargain with mortals.

The entire process of sacrifice was highly complex. After prayer, the sharing of wine and a long-involved ritual, the animal would be killed and skinned. Next the animal was opened and the entrails inspected and predictions made. Parts of the animal would be set aside for the gods before the rest was cooked and fed to those in attendance.

Although often the case, the sacrifice did not necessarily have to involve the death of an animal; the only requirement was that it was a living thing, and so wine, cheese, fruit or even breadcrumbs could be used instead. A law had been passed in the 1st century BCE forbidding the sacrifice of humans, implying that they had been carried out before.

Marble fragment showing the preparation of a sacrifice, dating from the 2nd century CE



Outside the Pantheon, Rome. A sacrificial ceremony and procession take place, with bulls, sheep and pigs being slaughtered c.200 CE

Tol. 84.
Sacerdotes qui populum lustrant
Popae hostiarum viscera auferentes
Victima percussa
Ministri cum canistris carne immolanda plenis
Hostia Exenterata
Hostia Jugulata
Haruspices
Tubicines
Cythareoedi
Pontifices
Augures
Flamines
Popae
Tibicines
Princeps Sacrificans
Tibicines
Camilli
Camillus puer
ANTIQUORUM SACRIFICANDIRITUS ex Onuph. Panvinio.
Popae Victimarii
Haruspices
Ministri Sacrorum
I. v. Gucht Sculp.

who were wanting help with love or affairs of the heart would go to one dedicated to Venus. Despite the grandiose setting of the temple, the religious ceremony and sacrifices actually occurred outside. The front of the temple building was emphasised with pillars and columns to reflect this, drawing attention to the focal point of the altar where the action took place.

Due to the vital importance of religious ritual and ceremony being conducted properly, the public religious life of Rome was carried out by the all-important priests. Priests had many roles; among them were leading rituals and processions, conducting sacrifices, interpreting omens and declaring festival days. There were different types of priest who held different functions and responsibilities, and there were four major colleges of priests, the pontiffs being the most important and influential.

A votive depicting a mother and child, discovered in the Forum of Augustus, Rome

> “Temples might be built as a thanksgiving to the gods after a triumph, or as a bargain to guarantee success”

The relationship between the Roman people and their gods was a complex one, but in essence it was a relationship built on a series of bargains or trades. The worshipper would ask for something from the gods, promising something in return if the gods did what was requested. To help sweeten the deal, offerings – perhaps of wine or food – or a sacrifice carried out in the god’s name might be made to further encourage a favourable outcome. Prayer was very important, both in private and public worship, and ritual or sacrifice that did not come accompanied with prayer was not considered to be effective. Prayer alone, however, could and did achieve results.

Everyone took part in the religious life of the empire, including those generally considered to be of lower social status such as slaves and women. In fact there were some ceremonies that only women could conduct, and Rome’s Vestal Virgins remain famous in memory even today. Women did not perform animal sacrifice, and their role in public religious life was generally limited.

The Romans had many days of religious significance, and at some points in the empire’s history there were more sacred days within the calendar than non-sacred days. Some of these lasted only a few hours, while others – like the festival of Saturnalia – could last for almost an entire week. Each god had a day dedicated to them, too, and these were often public holidays.

As well as the ‘official’ religion of the empire, there were several other cults and religions that existed alongside it. One of these was the imperial cult that worshipped and deified the person of the emperor. There were also ‘mystery’ religions that were imported from areas conquered by the Romans, such as the cult of Mithras. Of course Christianity was the most influential and prevalent of these foreign cults and religions, becoming the official state religion of the empire in the 4th century CE and bringing to an end – formally, at least – the practice of the old religion of the gods.

Crime and punishment

Religion permeated every aspect of Roman life, and the dealing with of wrong-doers was no exception. Treason was considered a threat and direct affront to order, both social and religious, and was therefore dealt with as a religious crime. If found guilty, the perpetrator risked execution, often in the form of a sacrifice to Ceres or another underworld god. Treason could take many forms, and those who moved boundary stones, defrauded clients, committed arson or patricide – the killing of one’s father – were guilty of not just a crime but affronting the gods.

Keeping your word was also of great importance, and an oath was considered an agreement between the oath swearer and the god or gods he swore to. If the oath was broken, it was a very serious offence, the person placing themselves in effect outside of society and therefore at the mercy of the gods. If someone killed the oathbreaker, they were not considered guilty of murder – instead it was interpreted as the gods punishing the person for breaking the contract made with them. Sacred law maintained that both slaves who turned to theft and men who gave false testimony were to be thrown from the Tarpeian Rock. The picking of crops not your own under cover of night was punishable by death and sacrifice to Ceres. Priests were not immune, and those who did not fulfil their duties and were deemed inferior were liable to punishment by the pontiffs.

Priests were essential to the religious wellbeing of the empire. Here are some of the many types

Statue of Mars, god of war: festivals dedicated to this god dominated the month of March, which took his name

Rex Sacorum

Their original purpose was to replace the religious role previously held by the kings of Rome with the dawning of the Roman Republic, the word *rex* a reminder of the origin of their position. These priests could not hold public office and were barred from sitting in the Senate in an attempt to curtail their power. They were later responsible for declaring the many religious festivals on the calendar.

Quindecimviri

The Quindecemviri were charged with the important task of guarding the Sibylline Books, which contained prophecies concerning the fate of the empire and were consulted at important moments to see what needed to be done. They were also responsible for amalgamating any gods of foreign origin adopted by Rome.

Pontiffs

Overseen by the Pontifex Maximus, a position that in time became the pope, this group carried out the public ritual and ceremony involved on a day-to-day basis. They were the general overseers of public rites. The most illustrious of the four main colleges of priests, they also appointed members to the other priesthoods.

Augurs

Responsible for divination through interpreting the flight paths of birds, Augurs were also charged with declaring whether the outcome of an action would be positive or doomed to failure in all aspects of life, from battle to trade to religion. The Augurs interpreted the entrails of sacrificed animals and were responsible for determining the wishes of the gods so people could act accordingly.

Flamines

These priests were dedicated to a particular god or goddess, and were responsible for taking care of the temple of the god they represented. The most important of the *flamines* were those of Jupiter (*flamen dialis*), Mars, (*flamen martialis*) and Quirinus (*flamen quirinalis*). Believed by some to be the oldest of the Roman priests, the *flamines* tended to hold their post for life.

© Getty

Temple of the Gods

One of Ancient Rome's most enduring constructions, the Pantheon is a building worthy of the gods and that defies the imagination

Constructed between 118 and 125 CE by Emperor Hadrian, the concrete and stone masterpiece that is the Roman Pantheon was a polytheistic temple dedicated to all of the gods of pagan Rome and consists of a circular building beneath a coffered concrete dome with a round opening (*oculus*) in the middle. It was built to replace the original Pantheon that was built in 27 BCE by Agrippa, the right-hand man of Emperor Augustus, which burnt down during the great fire of 80 CE. It was then rebuilt by Emperor Domitian but suffered a similar fate as the original when it was struck by lightning in 110 CE. Hadrian designed the Pantheon, and it is still standing today, and its a popular feature of Rome, visited by millions of tourists every year.

The design of the building served up an ancient special effect of sorts because at noon on an equinox, the sun shines down through the oculus at such an angle that it passes through a grille above the closed door and lights up the courtyard at the front. As the Romans celebrated 21 April as the founding date of the city, it was quite the sight to see the emperor standing at the entrance of the Pantheon, bathed in light coming from the inside.

In 609 CE, the Pantheon was gifted to Pope Boniface IV by the Byzantine emperor Phocas, and it was the first pagan temple to be turned into a church. Dedicated to the Virgin Mary and all the Martyrs, the fact that the Pantheon was in continual use throughout the middle ages undoubtedly saved it from being destroyed.

Inside the Pantheon

From the materials used to build it, through to the multipurpose oculus at its apex, everything about the Pantheon amazes

Of all of the surviving structures of Ancient Rome, it is the Pantheon that elicits amazement the most, thanks to its breathtaking construction. The huge dome, opened at the top by an oculus that lets in daylight, was an entirely Roman invention made out of mouldable concrete set over a wooden frame. It remains as the world's largest unreinforced concrete dome to this day. The diameter of the dome is 43.30 metres (142 feet) and is in perfect proportion with the temple, as the distance from the floor to the top of the dome is exactly the same as the diameter.

The interior of the dome was intended to symbolise the arched vault of the heavens and the oculus at the apex of the dome is the only natural source of light within the building, apart from the doorway. Throughout the day, light passing through the oculus moves around the space within the temple in a reverse sundial effect, and this opening also provides ventilation for the building. During heavy storms, the slightly sloped floor directs rainwater down into a neat drainage system below.

M·AGRIPPA·L·F·COS·TERTIVM·FECIT

The Pantheon is located in the Piazza Della Rotunda in Rome and is supported by 16 Corinthian columns

© ThinkStock

Maidens of Mythology

For Roman women, the stories in mythology were not just legends, but guides of how to behave in their own lives

When Rome was founded, it did not have its own rich history or mythology like the nations surrounding it, so the Roman people were forced to create their own with myths and legends borrowed from their Greek neighbours. Over time, Roman mythology took on a life of its own and became a central aspect of life in the empire. Every city had a patron deity, with temples created in their names and rituals and festivals to celebrate them. Although women did not stand equal with men in their daily lives, in the world of the gods, they were just as worshipped and venerated.

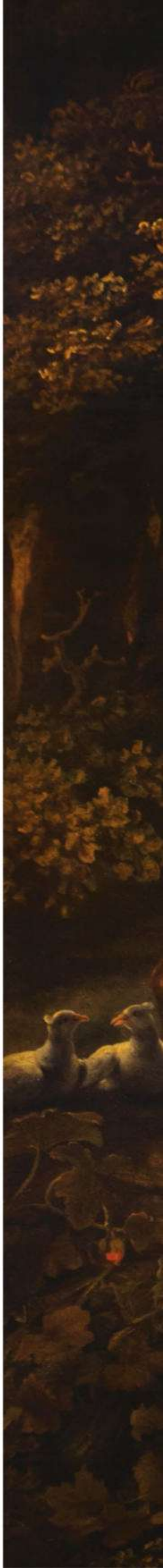
In the Greek myth, woman was created as a creature second to man, and even is alluded as being a bringer of sadness and vices. However, the same cannot be said for Roman mythology; there is no distinction between man and woman – even the first creature created is not given a specific gender. Roman myth seemed to understand that man is not entirely separate from woman, and they are not different races; instead, they must work together to unite their strengths for the good of the nation.

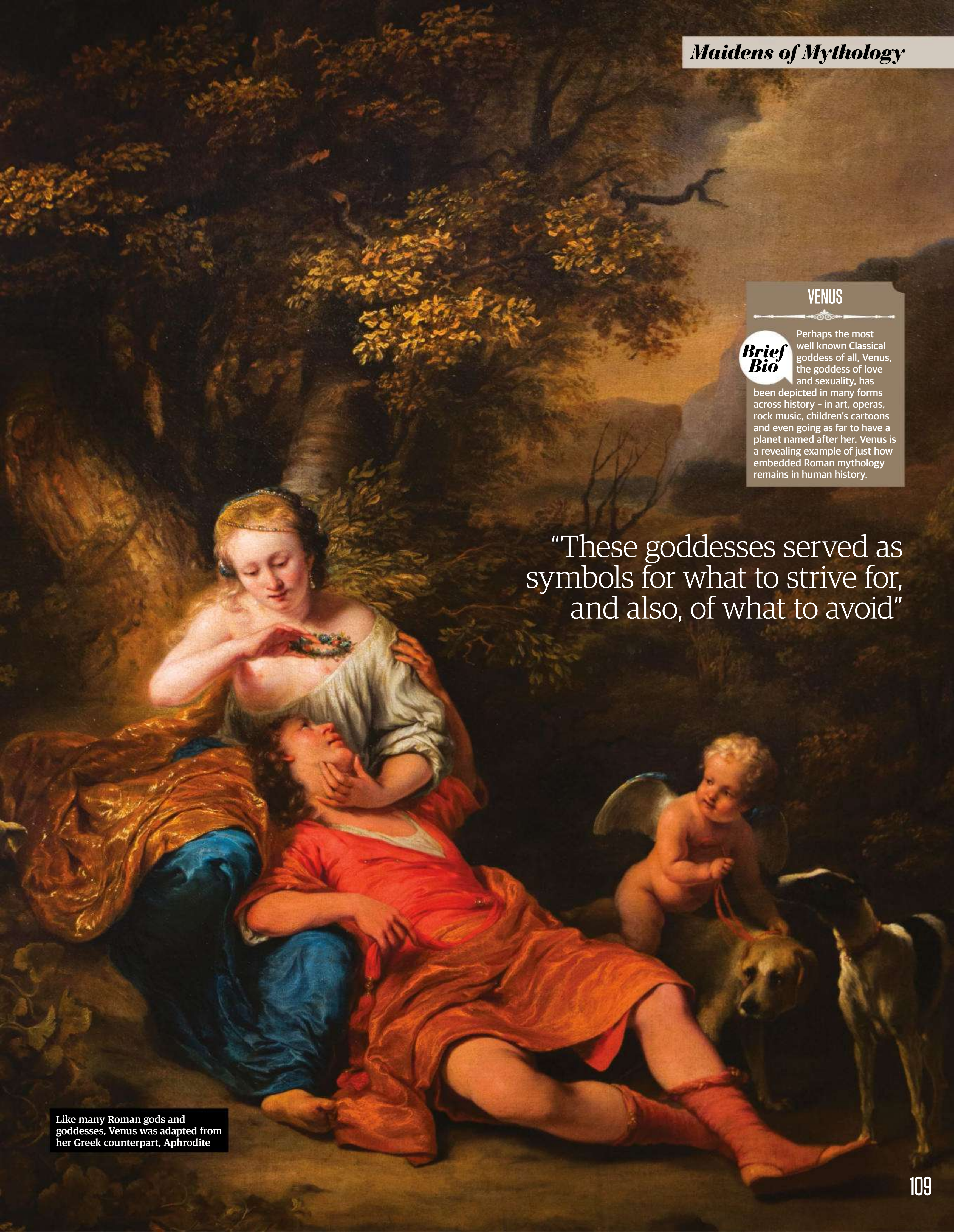
Roman goddesses came to represent some of the ideals of womanhood in the empire, Venus was the goddess of fertility, beauty and sex. Venus, to the Romans, symbolised the female yielding, watery nature. But rather than representing weakness, Venus was portrayed as the crucial counterpart to the active, fiery male god of Mars. Together, the two figures, male and female, worked in unison to provide harmony, strength and stability. Even Minerva, who came to be regarded as a goddess of battle, was often portrayed in mourning for the dead, as opposed to standing victorious over enemy corpses. Juno, queen of the gods, was goddess of marriage and childbirth – and these two aspects of life were seen as so important that she was made patron god of the city of Rome itself. Again and again the Romans worshipped and revered typically female figures, acknowledging just how vital and important the feminine traits they represented were to the empire as a whole.

One of Venus' many symbols is myrtle, a flower thought of as a powerful aphrodisiac

For women in Rome, these goddesses and the female characters from myth and legends served as symbols for what to strive for, and also, of what to avoid. With their statues displayed all over cities, festivals celebrated in their name and their stories recounted repeatedly, women in Rome were told over and over again the aspects of these figures that they should replicate in themselves. These ideals were not hidden or subtle, but all around them from the moment they were born.

Although women in Ancient Rome were regarded as citizens, their power in regards to the state was limited. They could not hold office, and they





Like many Roman gods and goddesses, Venus was adapted from her Greek counterpart, Aphrodite

VENUS

Brief Bio

Perhaps the most well known Classical goddess of all, Venus, the goddess of love and sexuality, has been depicted in many forms across history – in art, operas, rock music, children's cartoons and even going as far to have a planet named after her. Venus is a revealing example of just how embedded Roman mythology remains in human history.

> "These goddesses served as symbols for what to strive for, and also, of what to avoid"

couldn't vote. However, several standout examples did use their own cunning and intelligence to influence behind the scenes, but any great details about Roman women are absent from the history books. We know many of their names, but they are known as wives, sisters and daughters - not people or individuals in their own right. For women in Rome, the expectation was to become a wife and a mother, and this expectation manifested itself into the myths and legends which were so prominent in Roman life and belief.

Perhaps the most prominent myth concerning women's place in Roman society is the Rape of the Sabine Women. The tale tells that when Romulus founded Rome the city was strong and prosperous, it faced no fear from other tribes, as they could easily be defeated by Rome's powerful troops.

However, Rome faced a crisis: the city was experiencing a lack of women. After failing to form alliances with nearby tribes, Romulus took more extreme actions. He invited a neighbouring tribe, the Sabines, into the city to celebrate the festival of the Consualia. When Romulus gave a signal, the Roman men grabbed the Sabine virgins and carried them away. Rome had acted to form an alliance, but the Sabines, understandably, were not happy.

War broke out between the two tribes, but the Sabine women, who had taken to their roles as Roman wives, were distressed. In one of the battles, the women rushed forward and stood between the two tribes, imploring them to stop fighting. The husbands, brothers and fathers were touched by the women's words and decided to make peace.

This isn't a story of warning, it is one that stresses just how important women were regarded. They were what united the two warring tribes; they put a stop to the bloodshed, and ultimately it is the women that bring peace. This tale presses to them the importance they bear in forming alliances and growing stronger as a nation. The women were taken against their will, but they accepted their fate, embracing their roles as wives and mothers. It sent a clear message to any young girl told the tale - your role is help strengthen Rome

> The Vestal Virgins were charged with keeping the sacred fire burning on the goddess's altar

Rome's most iconic women

Roman mythology was filled with strong and iconic females, who were worshipped for various traits in Roman society

Bellona

The goddess of war, Bellona is often depicted dressed in military clothing with a helmet and brandishing a weapon. Her temple was used by the Roman Senate as a place to discuss foreign war, and it was from here that the opening of war was officially declared.

Venus

Venus was the goddess of love, beauty, sex and desire. In Roman myth she is regarded as the mother of the Roman people, and thus she became a central figure in Roman life. She was so highly regarded that Julius Caesar himself claimed to be descended from her.

Juno

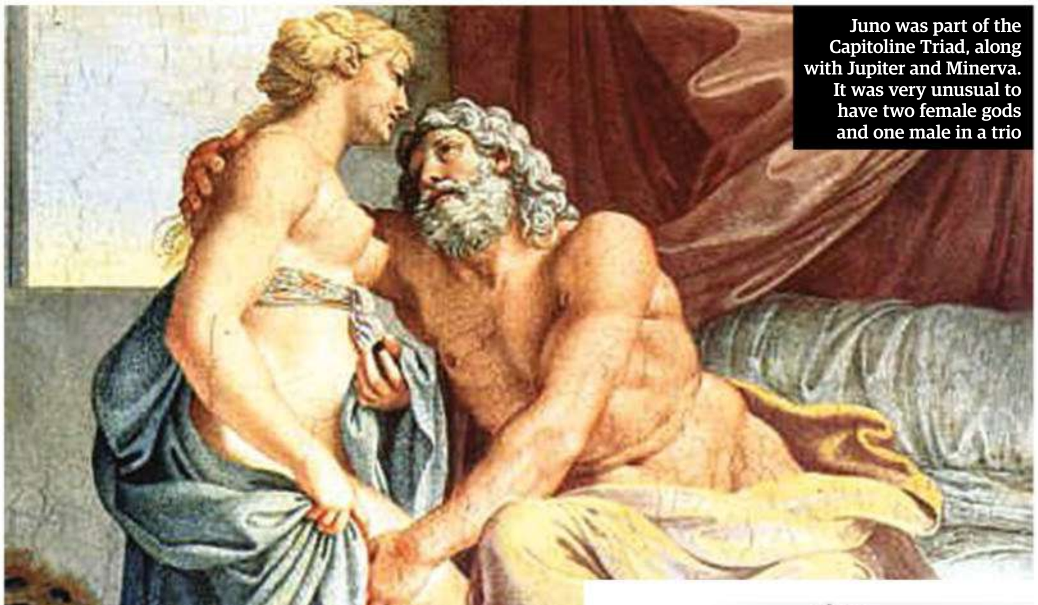
Wife of Jupiter, the king and most prominent of all the Roman gods, Juno served as the protector of the women of Rome. She was also regarded as the patron goddess of the Roman Empire. There were many festivals surrounding Juno, mostly celebrated by the women of Rome.

Minerva

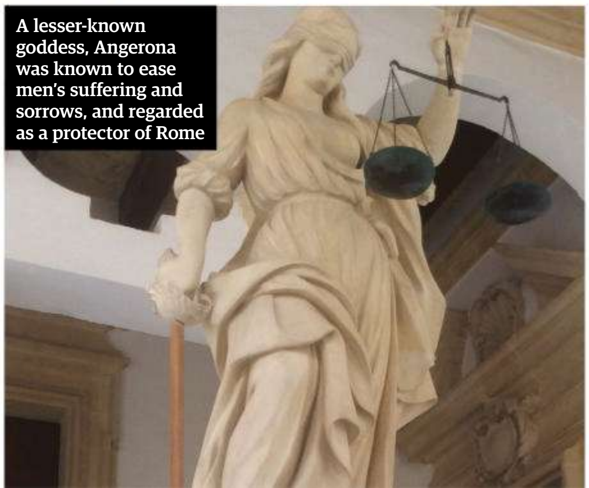
A virgin goddess and daughter of Jupiter, Minerva was worshipped as the goddess of the arts, music, poetry and wisdom. Eventually Minerva's role developed to be a goddess of war, and she would be worshipped prior to battle.

Diana

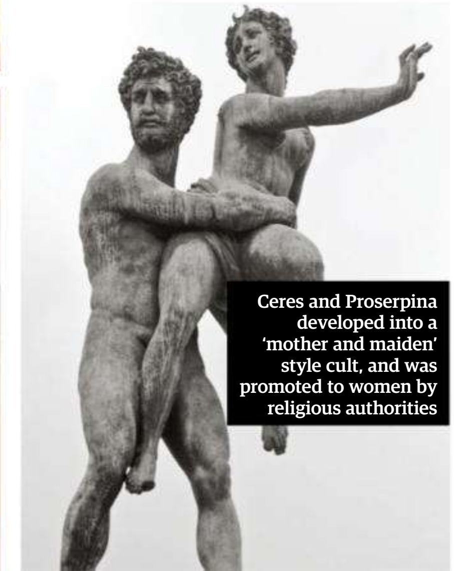
Goddess of the hunt, the moon and childbirth, Diana was also a virgin goddess and a very prominent figure for women in Ancient Rome. She was one of the oldest and longest worshipped goddesses, almost as old as the city itself. Diana was also a goddess of slaves, and those of lower class could claim sanctuary in her temples.



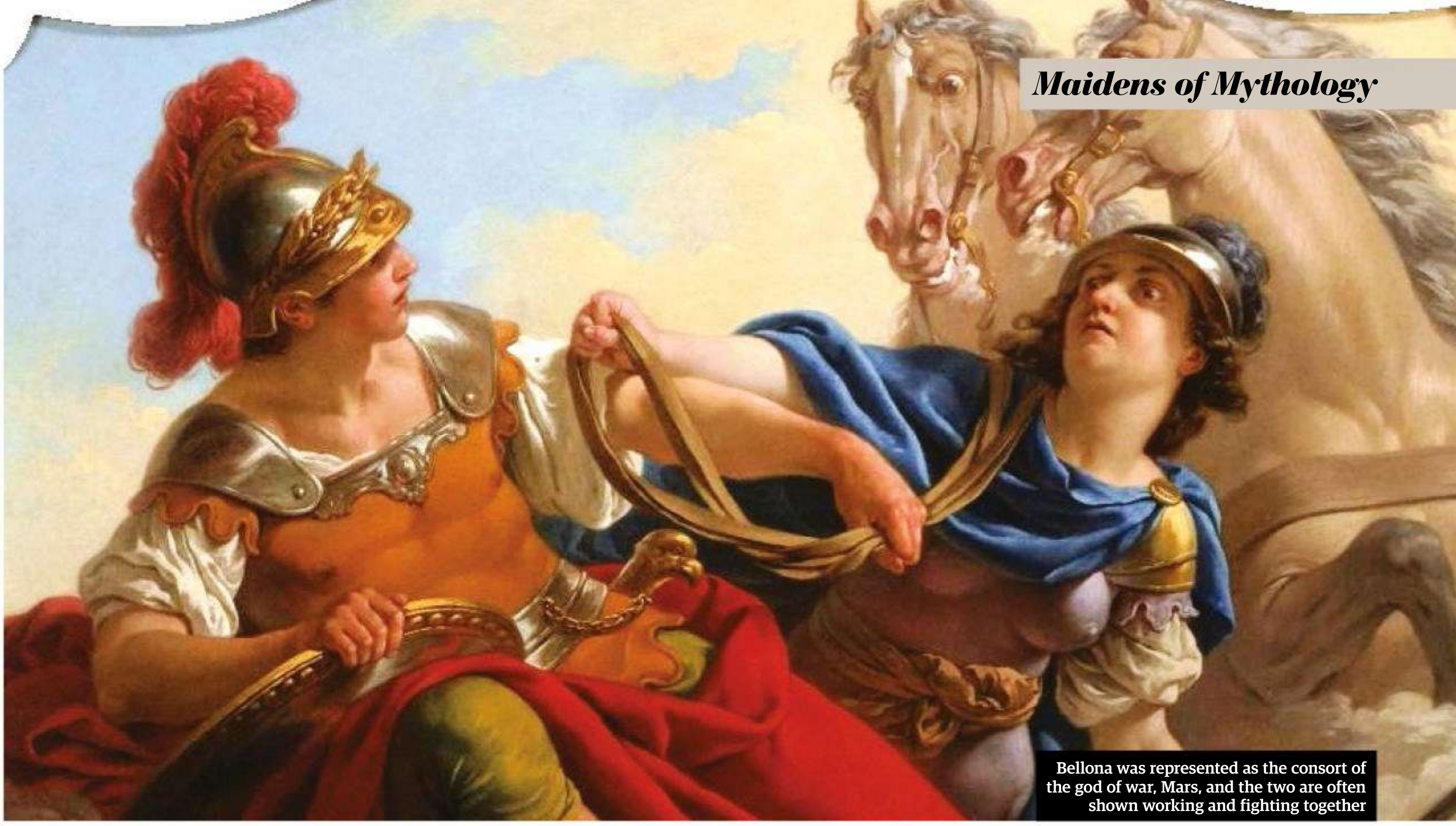
Juno was part of the Capitoline Triad, along with Jupiter and Minerva. It was very unusual to have two female gods and one male in a trio



A lesser-known goddess, Angerona was known to ease men's suffering and sorrows, and regarded as a protector of Rome



Ceres and Proserpina developed into a 'mother and maiden' style cult, and was promoted to women by religious authorities



Bellona was represented as the consort of the god of war, Mars, and the two are often shown working and fighting together

by marriage and alliances, you are a vessel to unite two strong families, and, although it may seem passive, your role is very important.

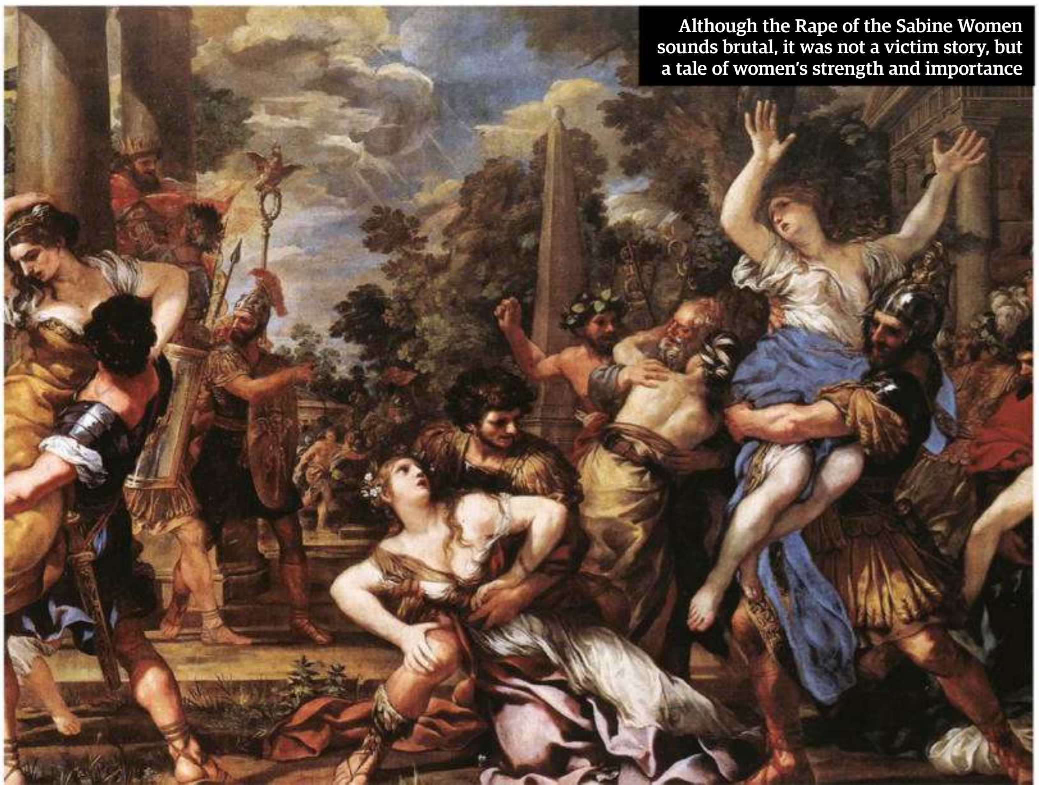
Another legend that emphasises the importance of a woman's role as wife and mother is in the story of Romulus and Remus. This famous tale of the founder of Rome itself features a prominent female character in that of the she-wolf. After the children are cast into the Tiber, they are saved by a she-wolf who suckles them. This image of a she-wolf suckling the twin boys became a very important and central image of the nation as a whole, displayed on statues and coins. Romulus goes on to establish the city and is celebrated as a hero, but the she-wolf, although with a relatively small role, was celebrated and revered heavily.

The message this sent to Roman women, growing up with this story, and likely bombarded by this image every day, is that although you will not become a hero, or a leader, your contribution in birthing and looking after children who will one day be is just as important. The tale gives value to a life of motherhood, for without the she-wolf, Rome would not be.

Not all myths treated their female characters with quite so much sympathy. There are many that used fear and punishment to serve as a warning to women about the correct way to behave. Although the labours of Hercules originated as a Greek tale, it also filtered into Roman mythology. The story of the Amazons, a race of warrior women who lived alone from men, bares a stark warning to any would-be independent woman. When Hercules asked to borrow the queen's belt, the queen fell in love with him and agreed to hand it over. The other Amazons, however, believed Hercules threatened their queen and attacked him. Hercules seized the queen, killed her, grabbed the belt and ran. This cautionary tale displays the folly of women who believe they can survive without men, and that no matter how strong they believe to be alone, they can still be outsmarted and defeated by man. Yet again, this tale tells women that their place in society should be in harmony with men.

These cautionary tales of women who did not fulfil their expected role in society began at an early age. Long before Shakespeare penned *Romeo and Juliet*, Ovid wrote the myth of Pyramus and Thisbe. Like *Romeo and Juliet*, Pyramus and Thisbe were star-crossed lovers who were forbidden to be together by their parents who have a rivalry. They decide to secretly meet up, but Thisbe sees a lioness and flees the scene, abandoning her veil. Pyramus finds the veil, assumes the worst and kills himself. Thisbe finds him and, distressed, joins him in death. This tragic tale was not regarded as a romance, but rather a warning to any young Roman girls who would follow their heart. It taught them the crucial lesson of listening to their parents' wishes, or run the risk of heartbreak and, ultimately, even death.

Romance very rarely featured in Roman myth in a positive light; it was deceptive and dangerous, especially to young women. Two of the most famous lovers in Greek and Roman mythology are Paris and Helen, and their affair caused the Trojan War. Roman mythology was filled with romance, but almost without fail it went hand in hand with tragedy. Women, like men, were not encouraged to give into their desires, but instead work together for the strength of their nation.



Although the Rape of the Sabine Women sounds brutal, it was not a victim story, but a tale of women's strength and importance

The sacred purity of maidens

How the Vestal Virgins became some of the most important in Rome

One of the most prominent themes in Roman mythology life was virginity. Several of the most prominent goddesses were celebrated as 'virgin goddesses'. Diana, the goddess of the hunt, the moon and, oddly enough, childbirth, was a virgin goddess. She was associated with all that is light, revered and linked to the heavenly world. In this way, it is clear to see that in Ancient Rome virginity was regarded as something to be held sacred.

Along with Diana, Minerva and Vesta made up the three maiden goddesses. Minerva was the goddess of wisdom and art, while Vesta was in charge of the hearth, home and family. These three goddesses were very popular and prevalent in Roman life. It is interesting to note just how many high-ranked goddesses were virgins, indicating how highly valued and sacred virginity, and the females who held it, were regarded.

Virginity was placed on such a pedestal of holiness and near divinity that the Vestal Virgins were created in Vesta's name. These priestesses were in charge of cultivating the sacred fire that burned in Vesta's temples, and took a vow of chastity, freeing them from the usual expectation of bearing children and marrying. Because the Vestal Virgins were chaste, they were seen as the only people sacred enough to carry out several rights and services that even their male superiors could not conduct. It was believed that these rites were carried out on behalf of the Roman people, so they were celebrated and hailed as a key part of the strength and stability of Rome.

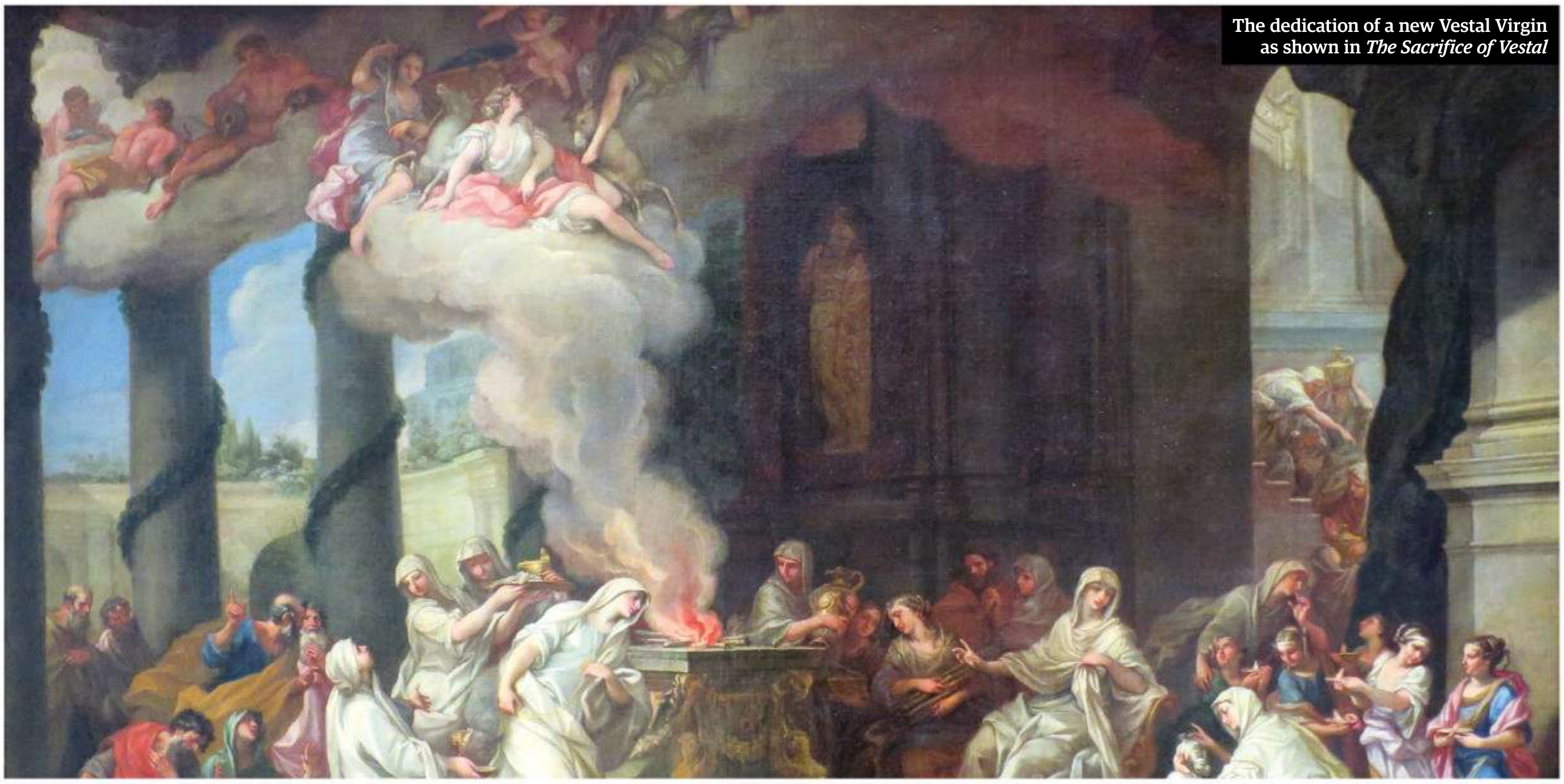
A 1st-century-BCE plate from the Hildesheim Silver Treasure depicting the goddess Athena

Their virginity was regarded so highly that any condemned prisoner who saw a Vestal on the way to his execution was pardoned immediately. Unlike any other women, they were free to own property, vote and make a will. Virginity was hailed as being as close to divinity on Earth. The punishment for a Vestal Virgin who broke her oath of chastity was death by live burial.

In Roman mythology, many examples press its importance. In the story of Romulus and Remus, it was a Vestal Virgin, Rhea Silver, who, after being raped by Mars, gave birth to the founders of Rome. In the story of Proserpina, the maiden daughter of Ceres and Jupiter is first depicted as the typical idealistic innocent virgin, collecting flowers and playing with nymphs. However, she is then abducted by Pluto, the god of the underworld, raped and dragged into the underworld to make her his queen. The nymphs cry from the loss of their fair maiden and Ceres, furious at the kidnapping of her daughter, creates the deserts.

In the Greek version of the same tale, Hades and Persephone form a powerful coupling, but in the Roman myth Proserpina is portrayed as a more unwilling victim. Jupiter tricks her into eating six pomegranate seeds, which forces her to return to him six months of the year. This story was used to explain the changing of the seasons, with spring indicating the joy of Proserpina's return, and the winter displaying a barren world when she must return to her captor. The loss of virginity is a heinous offense, for which the entire Earth suffers.

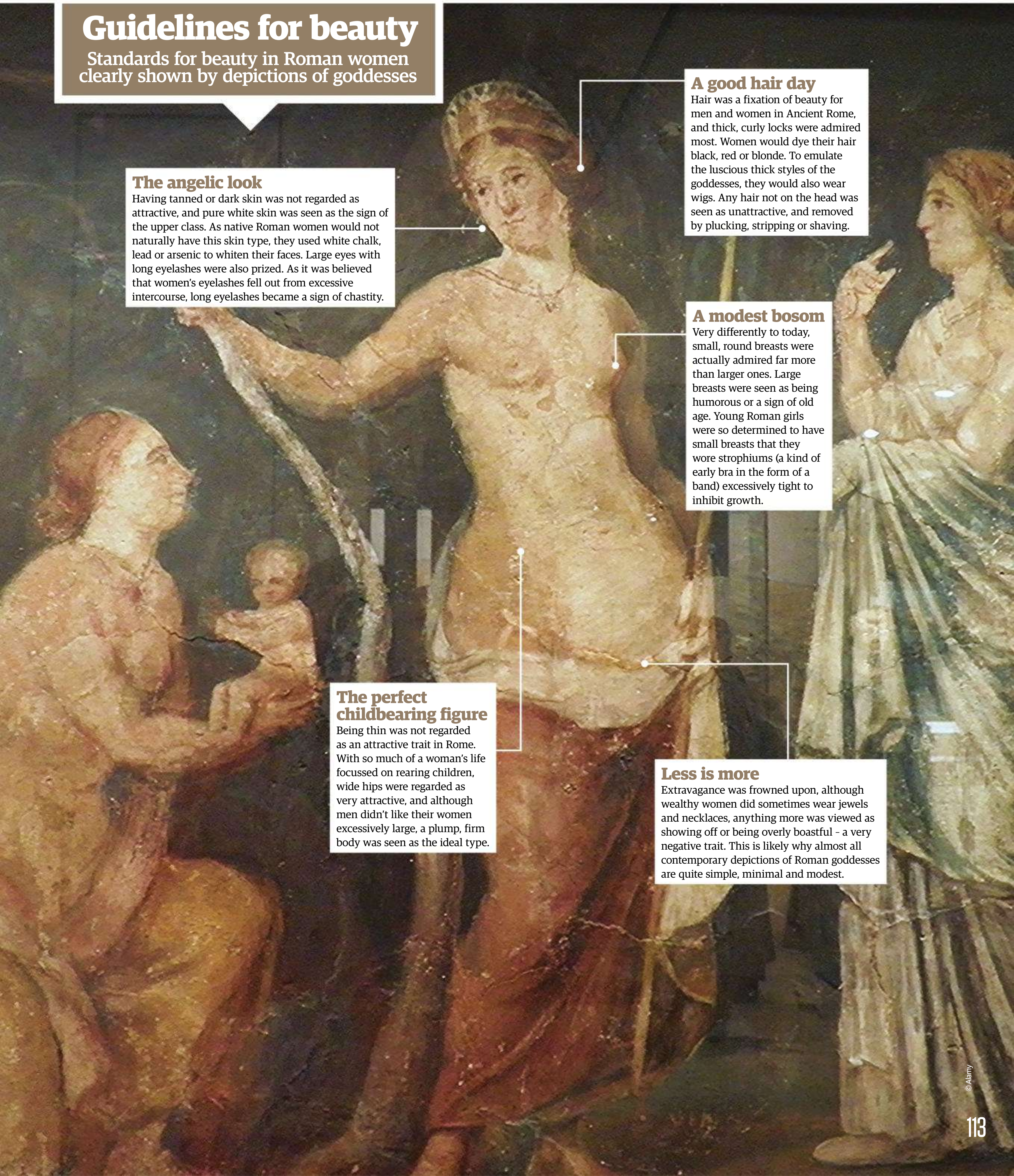
It is clear to see why the Romans may have upheld virginity in such a sacred light. Women were still regarded as men's property in Rome, and by ensuring women remained virgins before marriage, it could certify the paternity of their children. By making virginity such a sacred right, it put pressure on young girls to stay away from pre-nuptial sex and pregnancy before marriage. Having chaste women ensured that marriages between houses, and the continuation of lines was assured. Virgin women were able to maintain their self-restraint and show that they could follow the rules, which would make any of these women an appealing choice for a wealthy husband.



The dedication of a new Vestal Virgin as shown in *The Sacrifice of Vestal*

Guidelines for beauty

Standards for beauty in Roman women clearly shown by depictions of goddesses



The angelic look

Having tanned or dark skin was not regarded as attractive, and pure white skin was seen as the sign of the upper class. As native Roman women would not naturally have this skin type, they used white chalk, lead or arsenic to whiten their faces. Large eyes with long eyelashes were also prized. As it was believed that women's eyelashes fell out from excessive intercourse, long eyelashes became a sign of chastity.

A good hair day

Hair was a fixation of beauty for men and women in Ancient Rome, and thick, curly locks were admired most. Women would dye their hair black, red or blonde. To emulate the luscious thick styles of the goddesses, they would also wear wigs. Any hair not on the head was seen as unattractive, and removed by plucking, stripping or shaving.

A modest bosom

Very differently to today, small, round breasts were actually admired far more than larger ones. Large breasts were seen as being humorous or a sign of old age. Young Roman girls were so determined to have small breasts that they wore strophiums (a kind of early bra in the form of a band) excessively tight to inhibit growth.

The perfect childbearing figure

Being thin was not regarded as an attractive trait in Rome. With so much of a woman's life focussed on rearing children, wide hips were regarded as very attractive, and although men didn't like their women excessively large, a plump, firm body was seen as the ideal type.

Less is more

Extravagance was frowned upon, although wealthy women did sometimes wear jewels and necklaces, anything more was viewed as showing off or being overly boastful – a very negative trait. This is likely why almost all contemporary depictions of Roman goddesses are quite simple, minimal and modest.

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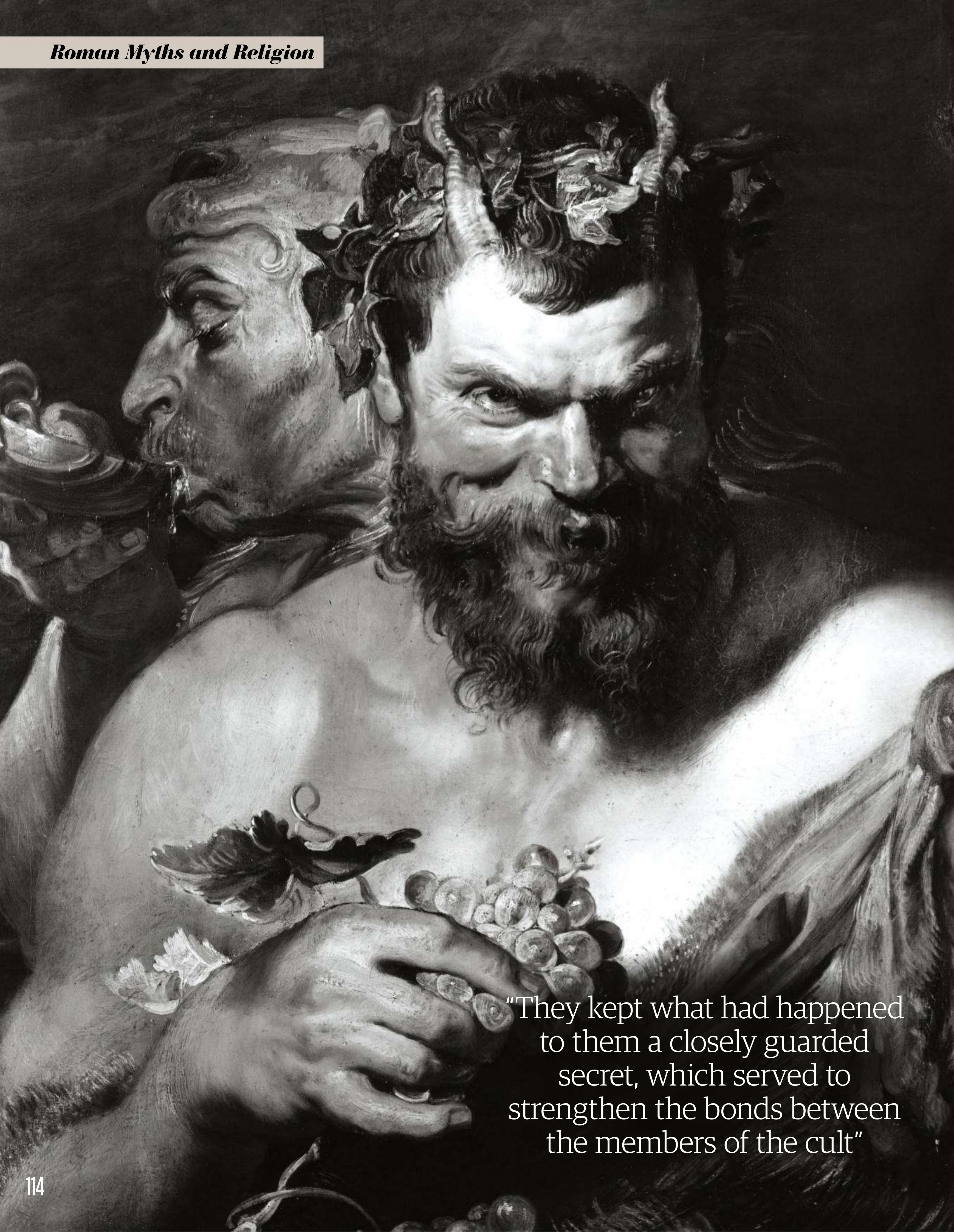


"They kept what had happened to them a closely guarded secret, which served to strengthen the bonds between the members of the cult"

Roman Mystery Cults

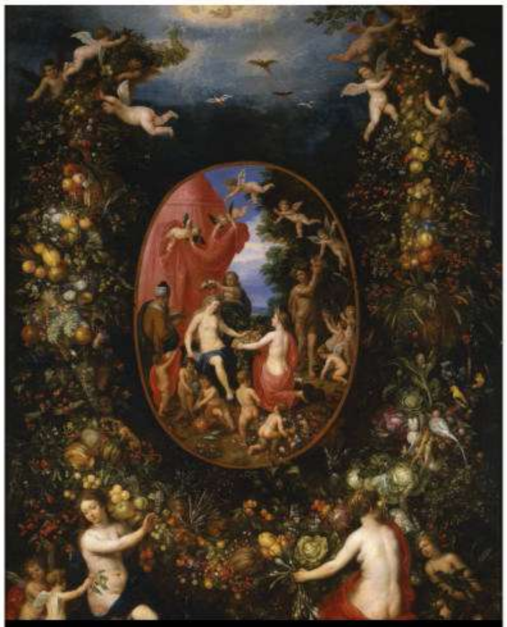
Uncover the secret rites and bizarre rituals of the Roman spiritual underworld

Much of Roman religion was public in nature. It was all-important to the residents of the city to maintain Rome's good relationship with the gods, and this was done through regular sacrifices and the maintenance of myriad temples dedicated to them. But behind closed doors, those seeking more intimate contact with the divine threw raucous parties, committed gruesome self-mutilation and performed ritual re-enactments. Known as 'mystery cults', these highly secretive societies spread through the Roman world from the East and became extremely popular.

These societies were dedicated to various gods and typically promised their devotees a happy afterlife. Mystery cults allowed the individual to participate directly in the worship service, and the ceremonies often involved ecstatic dancing and singing. These experiences were intended to be transformative, and differed greatly from the more staid rituals of public religion.

One of the earliest cults to come to Rome was that of the Magna Mater, the Great Mother. In 204 BCE, during the dark days of the war with Carthage, the Romans became aware of a prophecy they believed was the key to defeating the enemy. They had to seek out the Great Mother's cult-image and bring this to Rome from Ida, in the kingdom of Pergamum. Her symbol was a sacred stone, which they brought back to Rome, beginning a long tradition of her worship there. Other borrowings from the East included that of Mithras from Persia. Though Persia had long been an enemy of Rome, Mithras became a popular deity among the Romans, especially with soldiers, officials and merchants of the empire.

From Egypt in the 2nd century BCE came the cult of the mother goddess Isis, who became beloved across the Roman world, and from the Greeks, the Romans learned of Dionysus, whom they called Bacchus - the god of agriculture and wine. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this mystery cult's ecstatic rites included a lot of drinking and dancing, liberating its members and inducing a trance-like state.


In this 17th-century painting, the Magna Mater is being fed by allegorical depictions of the seasons

Another celebrated cult was the Eleusinian Mysteries, which were held at Eleusis in Greece every autumn and had as their foundation the mythological abduction and recovery by Demeter, goddess of agriculture, of her daughter, Persephone. Before the religious revelry could begin, however, members of the mystery cults had to be initiated.

Initiation

At the heart of each Roman mystery religion was the mysterium, a closely kept secret rite or point of theology. To gain knowledge of this 'mystery', a person had to undergo the process of initiation. This was completely voluntary; no one was compelled to join any of the mystery cults or take part in their ceremonies.

The purpose of the initiation ritual was to bring the individual, the initiate, into direct contact with a deity through an intense and unforgettable experience. This ecstatic experience was not meant to be explained, but felt. Afterwards, they kept what had happened to them a closely guarded secret, which served to strengthen the bonds between the members of the cult.

Initiation into the Bacchanalia, the cult of Bacchus, involved joining a group of Bacchic worshipers and dancing with them in the mountains. Most of these were women, called Bacchants. Some might also have private initiation, and in this case an initiate could be forced to abstain from food for ten days. Then came a period of feasting, after which they would ritually bathe as a form of purification. Only then were they allowed to enter into a shrine of Bacchus.

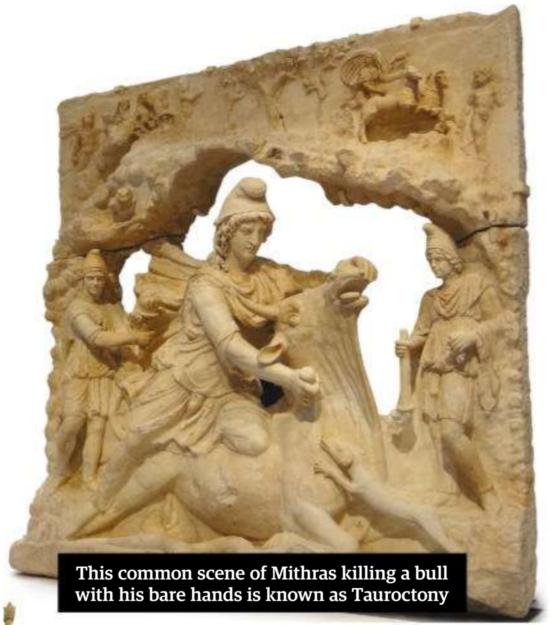
For the followers of Isis, also known as the Lady of the Mysteries, the initiation ritual was similar to that of Bacchus. Her initiates bathed, and were thus purified, and abstained from food for ten days before embarking on several days of feasting. The wearing of ceremonial robes also featured in the initiation, as well as the viewing of sacred hieroglyphs. The promise of life after death was part of what attracted many Romans to this benevolent goddess.

For those who wished to take part in the Eleusinian Mysteries, which continued on in Greece throughout the Roman imperial period, an initiate was made to take part in the so-called Lesser Mysteries that were held each spring in Athens, which was near Eleusis. This initiation process involved sacrifices, ritual purification, fasting and the singing of hymns.

The Great Mother was a figure representing the elemental feminine in its fertility aspect. Magna Mater's male priests, the Galli, were eunuchs, and they castrated themselves to be initiated into her priesthood. This extreme act was inspired by the myth that her lover, the god Attis, had done the same. Unlike the other mystery cults, Mithraism accepted only men into its mysteries.

There were seven grades of Mithras's cult, and each of the seven corresponded to one of the known planets of the day. Each grade also came with its own rites of initiation. In one, the naked and blindfolded initiate, his hands tied behind him, was made to kneel. Two other men stood beside him as part of the ceremony. A sword was pointed at him, and then he was made to lie prone on the floor. He then had to wear a crown, and continue to lie flat on the ground. Another initiation ritual involved shooting an arrow, thereby re-enacting a story from the life of Mithras in which the god launched an arrow into a rock, causing water to flow from it.

The Bacchus (Dionysian) Mysteries caused scandal in Rome, but this did not stop figures like Mark Antony becoming patrons



This common scene of Mithras killing a bull with his bare hands is known as Tauroctony

Rites

The cult of the Magna Mater, the Great Mother, was known by many names, including Rhea, Demeter, and especially Cybele, the great goddess of Phrygia, whose cult image the Romans brought to Rome. She was the mother of not just all of the gods, but of all humanity, too. Her rites in Rome maintained the link between the goddess and her original homeland in Asia Minor. Her sanctuary, set on the Vatican Hill, was known as the Phrygianum, and the leader of her cult was known as the Phrygian High Priest. There was an annual festival in Rome held in her honour, which ran for seven days and included races in the circus. Rites included dancing and music, with the playing of flutes, cymbals, horns and tambourines, and priests would slash themselves with knives while performing an ecstatic dance. Their flowing blood symbolically ensured the fertility of the world.

Inside the Roman Pantheon

The mystery cults supplemented, but did not supplant, the Romans' belief in their traditional gods

Jupiter

God of the sky, Jupiter was the greatest of the gods. He was the husband of Juno and the father of many of gods and heroes.

Venus

The goddess of love, she was irresistibly beautiful and had several affairs with gods as well as mortal men.

Apollo

The son of Jupiter by Leto was the god of music and the Sun. He was also the brother of Diana.

Roman mythology borrowed heavily from the Greeks, resulting in many gods, heroes and stories getting a Roman makeover

Talismans and trinkets

The Romans encountered their gods everywhere – in the home and on the road

The Roman home was protected by guardian spirits, known as lares. In origin, these were ancestral family spirits that watched over the household of their descendants. These tutelary gods stood at the centre of the family's religious life. A shrine containing a statuette of the spirit was set beside the hearth, and each morning they were greeted with prayers. At festival time, the lares were offered food. Outside the home, lares were thought to watch over the crossroads where the family's fields met another's. As such, they came to be known as the gods of travellers, too.

Another group of guardian spirits, known as penates, were the gods that protected the food pantry of a Roman household and also watched over the family as a whole. Said to have been brought to Rome from Troy by the hero Aeneas, these spirits were worshiped at the hearth of the home where a fire was always kept lit in their honour. At mealtime, the family sacrificed a bit of food to their household penates. In addition to the domestic lares and penates, there were also public spirits that watched over the Roman state.

One particularly dramatic ritual of Magna Mater that may have occurred was the taurobolium - a baptism in bull's blood. A pit was dug and wooden planks were placed over it. Next, a man lowered himself into the pit, and a bull was led onto the planks. The animal was then impaled by a spear, and its blood was allowed to run down through the spaces between the planks, spilling onto the man below. Once the bull had been drained of its blood, the man emerged, ritually purified for 20 years by the power of the Great Mother, acting through the bull's blood. This account comes from a Christian source and is considered anachronistic, and many historians believe that the blood was actually carefully collected into vessels instead.

The Egyptian goddess Isis shared much in common with the Great Mother, as they were seen as mistresses of life and fertility. Her rites guaranteed a blissful afterlife for participants. The theme of these ceremonies was the ritual re-enactment of the death and resurrection of her husband, Osiris. This also symbolised the rebirth of nature in springtime. A dead person might be summoned back to the realm of the living with the words, "Raise yourself to life: you do not die!" and "Osiris live! Stand up, unhappy one who dost lie there! I am Isis!" Just as Isis raised Osiris from the dead, so would the dead worshiper be raised again to life.

Like Magna Mater and Isis, Demeter was a mother goddess, and her mysteries at Eleusis commemorated her search for her daughter Persephone, or Kore, the maiden in Greek mythology. Carried off by Hades, Kore was held captive in the Underworld. The inconsolable Demeter roamed the Earth searching for her. Crops would not grow, and plague and death stalked the world. So bad did things become that Zeus himself was forced to intervene and secure Kore's freedom. But because she had eaten pomegranate seeds while in Hades' realm, she was forced ever after to spend one-third of the year there as his consort. Kore's time in the underworld is thus one of great sadness for her mother, and during this time, the season of winter, nothing grows upon Earth. With the arrival of spring, Demeter is reunited with her daughter and life returns to the earth.

Once an initiate had been inducted into the Lesser Mysteries, he or she was allowed to take part in the Greater Mysteries, which took place over

Diana
A maiden goddess of the hunt, Diana was the daughter of Jupiter by Latona and sister to Apollo.

Minerva
The wise warrior goddess Minerva was the daughter of Jupiter and a staunch patroness of mortal heroes.

Vulcan
Vulcan, son of Jupiter, was the smith of the gods, producing wondrous items in his forge. His wife was Venus.

Vesta
Goddess of the hearth, Vesta watched over the fire of the Roman household. She was Jupiter's sister.

several days of sacrifices, purification and fasting. The precise elements of the mysteries themselves are not known to historians today – they were shrouded in secrecy, after all – but they seem to have included music, dancing and a re-enactment of the abduction and recovery of Persephone. The most dramatic part of the mysteries seems to have been a vision beheld by the participant of something in the brightest of light.

Mithras was in origin a god associated with truth and a lieutenant of the primary Zoroastrian deity, Ahura Mazda. Once it came into the Roman world, Mithraism was a heavily changed religion that now viewed Mithras as a saviour. The rites of his cult echoed the origin myth of Mithras, who was said to have been born from a rock. Ahura Mazda had created first a wild bull, and Mithras wrestled it and hauled it into a cave. The bull escaped, but Mithras tracked it down and slew it by a dagger thrust to its throat. Life then flowed from the gushing blood of the bull. Mithraists would convene their worship meetings in underground chapels, which they called caves, where they shared communal meals of wine and bread. The goal of Mithraism was to purify the immortal soul, making it ready for a return to the realm of light upon death of the individual.

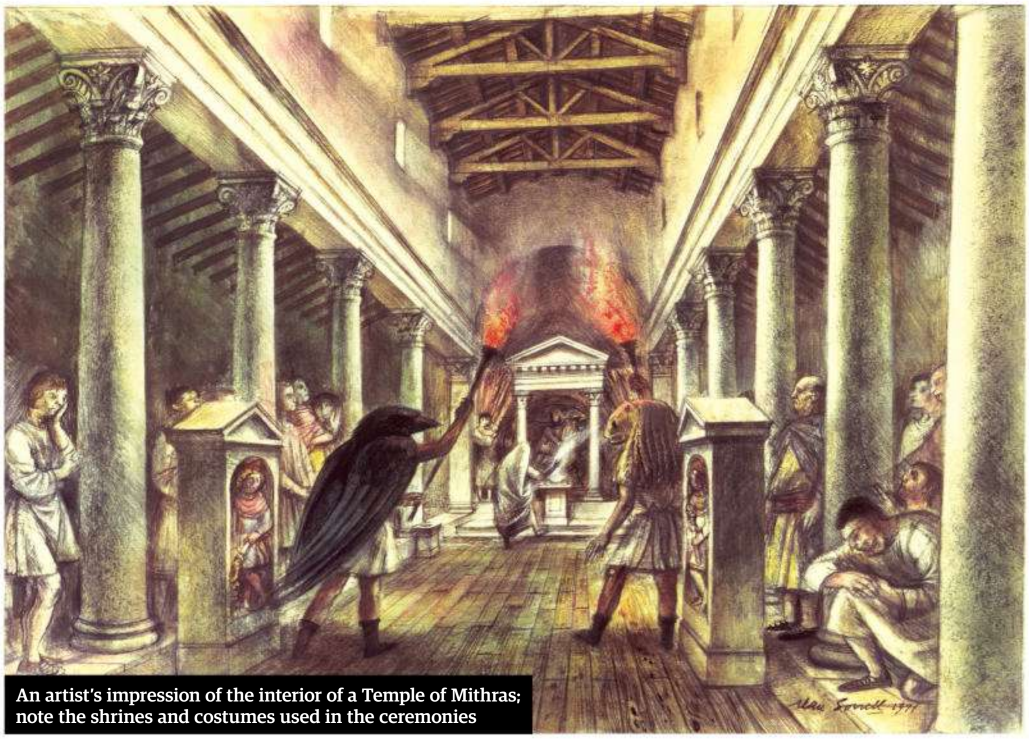
Suppression

Romans did not universally approve of mystery cults, even if they did achieve widespread popularity. Even some emperors joined the societies, not least among them Domitian, who was initiated into the mysteries of Isis, and Gallienus, who became an initiate of the Eleusinian Mysteries.

One Roman traditionalist – the 1st-century-BCE historian Livy – would write in horror that during Bacchic mysteries, "Matrons dressed as bacchants with their hair dishevelled, would run to the Tiber with burning torches, and plunge the torches into the water, then bring them up again still alight – as live sulphur was mixed with calcium. Men were said to be abducted by the gods, when they were tied to machines and carried out of sight into hidden caves." Not least, Livy seems to have feared the mysteries as excuses for all sorts of sexual licence between the male and female initiates. To some extent, the intense insistence upon secrecy logically, if unintentionally, induced anxiety among the uninitiated of Roman society.

Constantine's victory at the Milvian Bridge in 312 under the auspices of the Christian God led him to make Christianity a legal religion under imperial law the following year in the Edict of Milan. Christians increased in number and power as the 4th century progressed. The legal position of paganism, which the mystery cults were part of, began to deteriorate as Christianity became the most powerful religion in the empire. Still, the practice of mystery religions did not disappear quickly. Even in the late 4th century, prominent Romans would proudly acknowledge having been initiated into the mysteries of various cults. However, in 391, Emperor Theodosius I forbade pagan worship in Rome.

> "The intense insistence upon secrecy logically, if unintentionally, induced anxiety among the uninitiated of Roman society"



An artist's impression of the interior of a Temple of Mithras; note the shrines and costumes used in the ceremonies

Other forces would also act to bring about the end of mystery religions. In c.395, the Goths attacked and destroyed the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis; it was never repaired, signalling the end of the cult mysteries held there since at least the 6th century BCE.

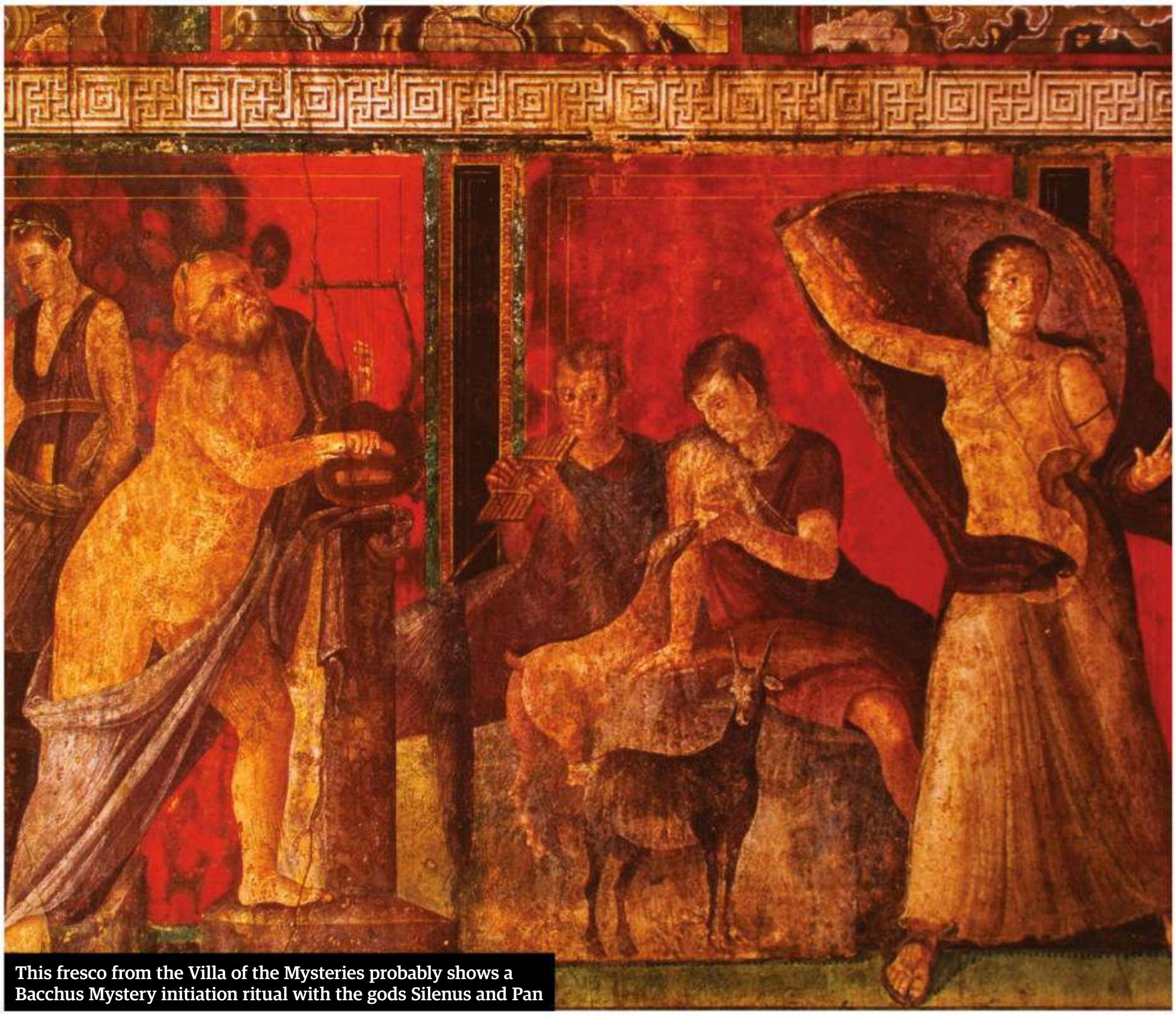
Paganism would hold on in diminished form for many years. There were still enough adherents that Saint Augustine saw the need to compose his City of God to rebut the allegation, put forward by Rome's remaining pagans, that the neglect of the old gods had led to the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410. The overall trend, however, was for mystery religions to fade away as the ancient world changed and the Middle Ages began.

Neptune
The trident-wielding Neptune was lord of the sea and the younger brother of Jupiter.

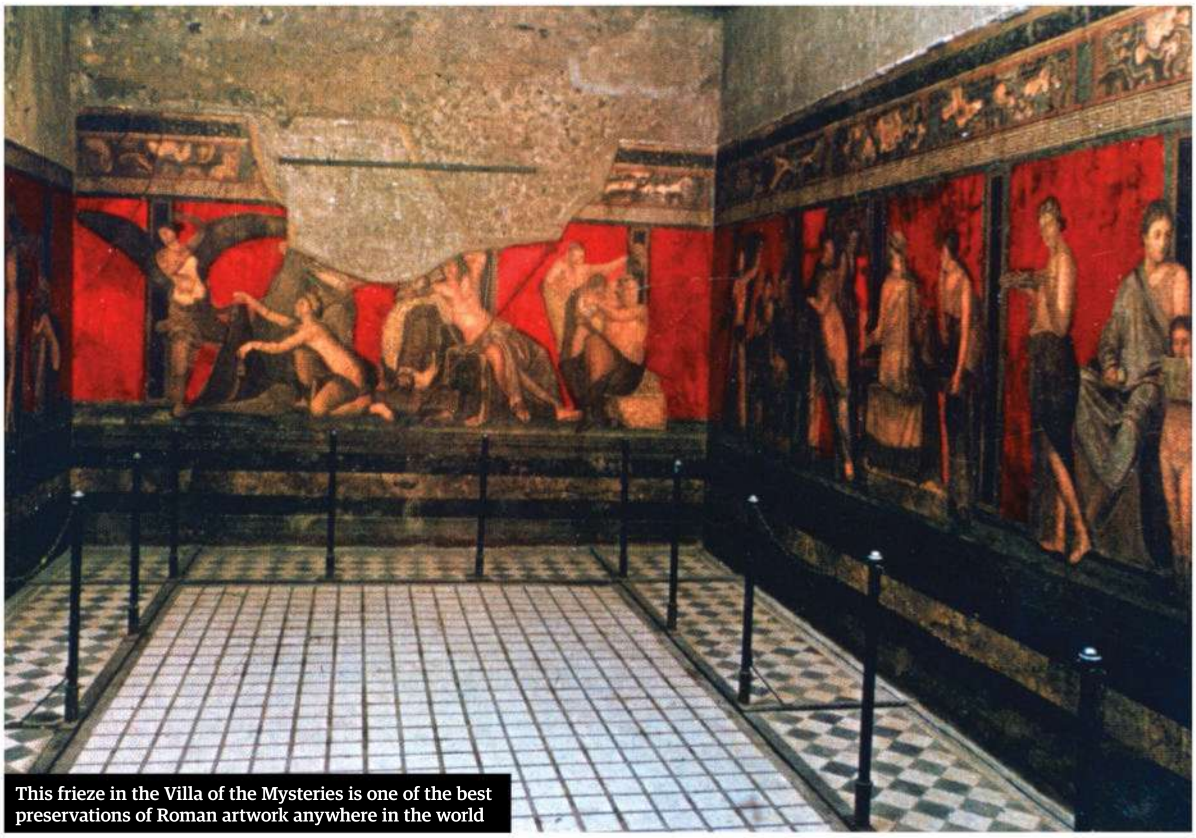
Mars
Mars was the honoured god of war among the military-minded Romans, second only to Jupiter in their estimation.

Mercury
The fleet-footed messenger of Jupiter, Mercury led the spirits of the dead to the underworld.

Ceres
Goddess of the earth and all growing things, Ceres was patroness of fertility and sister to Jupiter.



This fresco from the Villa of the Mysteries probably shows a Bacchus Mystery initiation ritual with the gods Silenus and Pan



This frieze in the Villa of the Mysteries is one of the best preservations of Roman artwork anywhere in the world

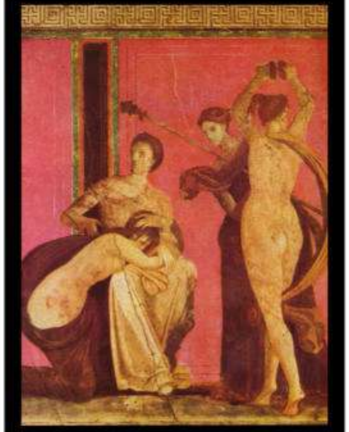
Villa of the Mysteries

Buried for centuries in ash, the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii is a window on to the mystery worship of ancient times

The mystery cult of Bacchus (Dionysus) found great favour in Rome and elsewhere in Italy. However, rare is the case where we can see how the mysteries of his cult – or that of any other god, for that matter – were celebrated by adherents. We are fortunate, then, to have the Villa of the Mysteries, a home that was preserved from the ravages of time, ironically, by the explosive volcanic eruption of Mount Vesuvius. In 79 CE, the nearby southern Italian town of Pompeii was buried completely by volcanic ash, and forgotten. It lay undisturbed until its rediscovery in the 18th century.

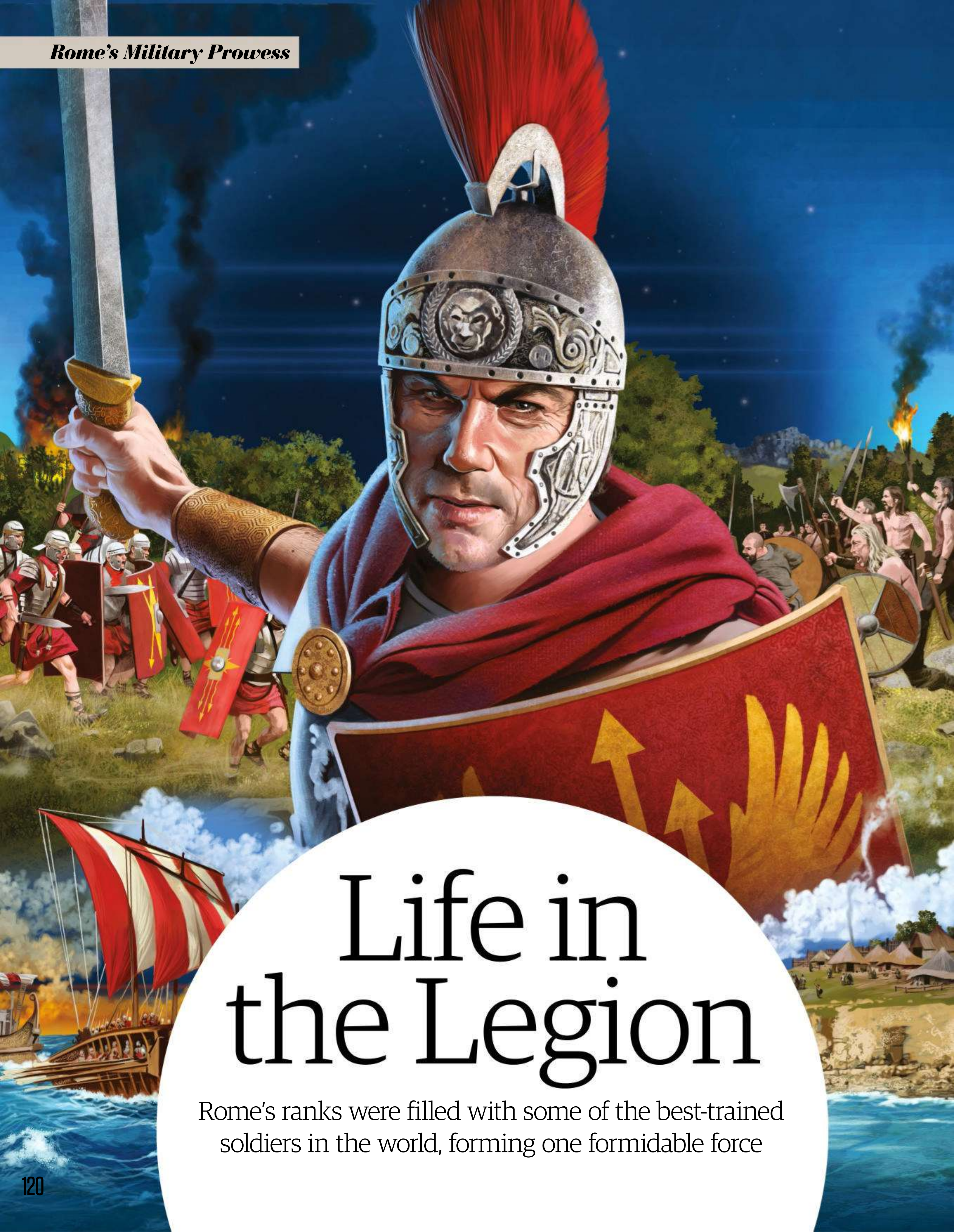
Within the villa is a room with painted friezes along its walls that depict the mystery worship of Bacchus in glorious colour and remarkable detail. These are arguably the most famous paintings of the Roman world still in existence. Running for about 20 metres (65 feet) around the room, the friezes show a number of figures at roughly human size of gods, men, women and mythological beings engaged in the cultic worship of Bacchus.

Interpreting the scenes is difficult, as much of their context has been lost. A damaged painting of Bacchus and his consort, Ariadne, would have been the first to be viewed when entering the room. In one scene, a plump Silenus plays a lyre; in another, a youthful Pan plays his flute. In one, a woman rests her head on the lap of another while a winged woman strikes her with a rod. Next to them both dances a woman with cymbals. It is most likely that the friezes inside the room depicted the initiation of a young woman in to the cult of Bacchus.



Rumours of sexual abuse and murder saw the Bacchus Mystery outlawed for a time

© Alamy, Getty Images, Thinkstock



Life in the Legion

Rome's ranks were filled with some of the best-trained soldiers in the world, forming one formidable force

Roman armies were highly organised and supremely disciplined entities of war. Each legion numbered around 5,000 men, all trained and armed to defeat enemies from all across the vast Roman territories. The backbone of a legion was its legionaries, heavy infantry with sworn allegiance to the Senate and the people of Rome (Senatus Populusque Romanus), and later to the emperor.

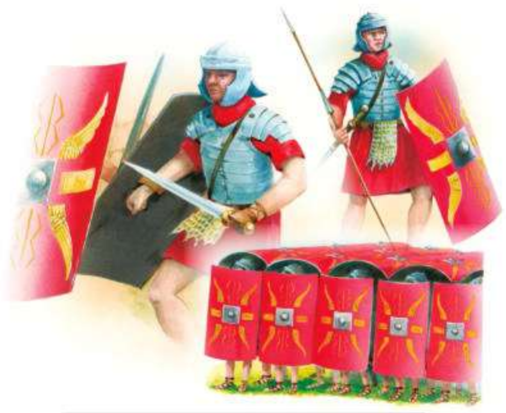
However, the daily lives of these men weren't filled with glorious adventures fighting Rome's enemies but were instead governed by strict routine, endless hours of marching, and yet more hours spent training.

As a legionary, you would march, work, eat, fight and rest alongside the men of your contubernium, or squad. Each contubernium contained eight soldiers, with ten contubernia making up one centuria. At the end of each day's march, after constructing the legion's fortifications for the night, each squad would set up its own tent then enjoy some precious down time. One servant was assigned to each squad, and they who would repair kit, cook, clean and carry out any general chores for the soldiers. At least one member of each squad would be assigned to guard duty throughout the night, before the camp rose at the crack of dawn and prepared to march once more.

Training and drills

Officers trained their men mercilessly using techniques and combat styles developed by gladiators. Experience of the competitive and bloody contests in the arenas had made gladiator trainers experts in teaching fighters how to best their opponents.

New recruits practised with wooden swords and shields, which were heavier than the equipment they would be armed with in battle. This was intended to build up strength and stamina for the real fight. Practising on wooden stakes, recruits repeated drills to strike at the head, legs and torso, all while dodging and blocking as if their lives depended on it.



New recruits would have to master the pilum (javelin) and the gladius (sword), as well as battlefield formations

These re-enactors are playing the role of auxiliary cavalry, armed with spears and longer swords for cutting down the enemy

The next stage of training was the armatura, a sparring exercise that pitched two soldiers head to head. Wielding blunted or covered blades to avoid injury, soldiers attacked and parried one another using the same techniques learned fighting the wooden stakes. Legionaries trained in this way throughout their careers to maintain their skills. In fact, it was so important to the legions that buildings were constructed especially for this purpose, so practice could continue regardless of the weather. Those who underperformed during training were punished with a reduction in their rations, heavy fines, or even a rough beating from an officer.

Weakness or dissent in the ranks could mean the difference between victory and defeat, so strict discipline was often enforced through harsh punishments. Depending on the circumstances, crimes such as theft, desertion or even falling asleep on duty could be met with a whipping, demotion or even public execution - usually by being clubbed to death. In very rare circumstances where entire units ran away in the face of the enemy, the sentence of decimation was carried out - one in every ten of the accused would be executed. The fear of such a fate was usually enough to bolster the courage of any wavering squad or centuria.

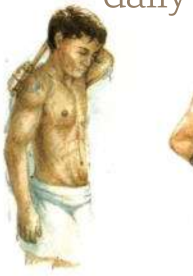
Blood and coin

A regular wage was one of the key attractions for recruits, and legionaries were the highest-paid units in the army. Through promotion and time served, soldiers could hope to receive pay-and-a-half (sesquiplicarius), and veteran troops eventually could get double pay (duplicarius). While auxiliary recruits were generally paid a little less, they had the additional lure of being granted full Roman citizenship on completion of 25 years' military service.

Anyone looking to earn a little more could seek out both wealth and glory in war. In the aftermath of a battle, generals were known to reward particularly brave actions, or those who had received grisly wounds in the line of duty. After the Battle of Dyrrhachium (48 BCE), for example, Julius Caesar was presented with a shield that had been pierced by over 100 arrows - he rewarded its owner, a centurion, with riches and honourable promotion.

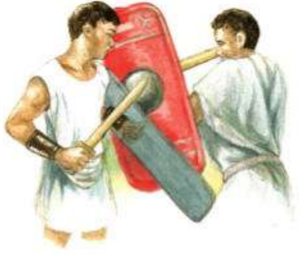
A day in Rome's ranks

Backbreaking work, relentless training and routine marches were just a few of a legionary's daily tasks



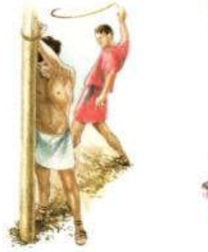
Washing

Soldiers were expected to maintain their own equipment but also their own personal hygiene during their limited free time each day. While barracks often had comfortable adjoining bath houses, troops on campaign would wash with whatever resources they could find.



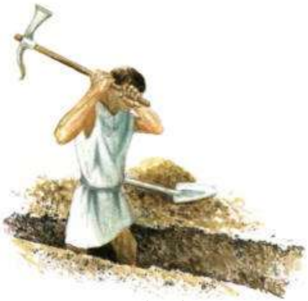
Training

Soldiers were expected to train daily, practising for real combat with wooden swords, slings, bows and javelins. Repeating tough battlefield drills prepared soldiers mentally and physically to face the enemy for real.



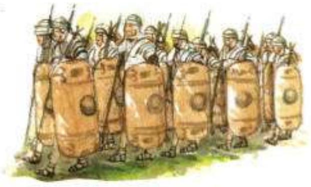
Martial punishment

Discipline was essential in the army, and breaking any rules could earn a severe sentence. Theft, desertion, disobeying orders and other crimes were often punishable by demotion, beatings, flogging or even public execution by clubbing.



Building fortifications

All soldiers would help construct a new temporary fortification at the end of each day's march, building trenches and wooden walls around the camp. This meant that no matter where the army travelled, it could ensure some level of protection from enemy attacks at night.



Marching

An army would be regularly ordered to march up to nine hours per day, with each soldier carrying their equipment and rations, which could weigh up to 40 kilograms. Disciplined marching was often the first thing taught to new recruits.

© Alamy (re-enactors)

However, during campaigns some men found less honourable ways to gain wealth. After a successful conquest, generals would often allow their men to pillage and loot, enabling legionaries to fill their pockets with the spoils of war. In many extreme cases, generals used this as a way to secure the loyalty of the army and prevent possible mutinies in the ranks. Legionaries lucky to live long enough could receive a bonus of 12,000 sesterces (praemia) upon retiring or even be granted land to settle down, often within the same region in which they served.

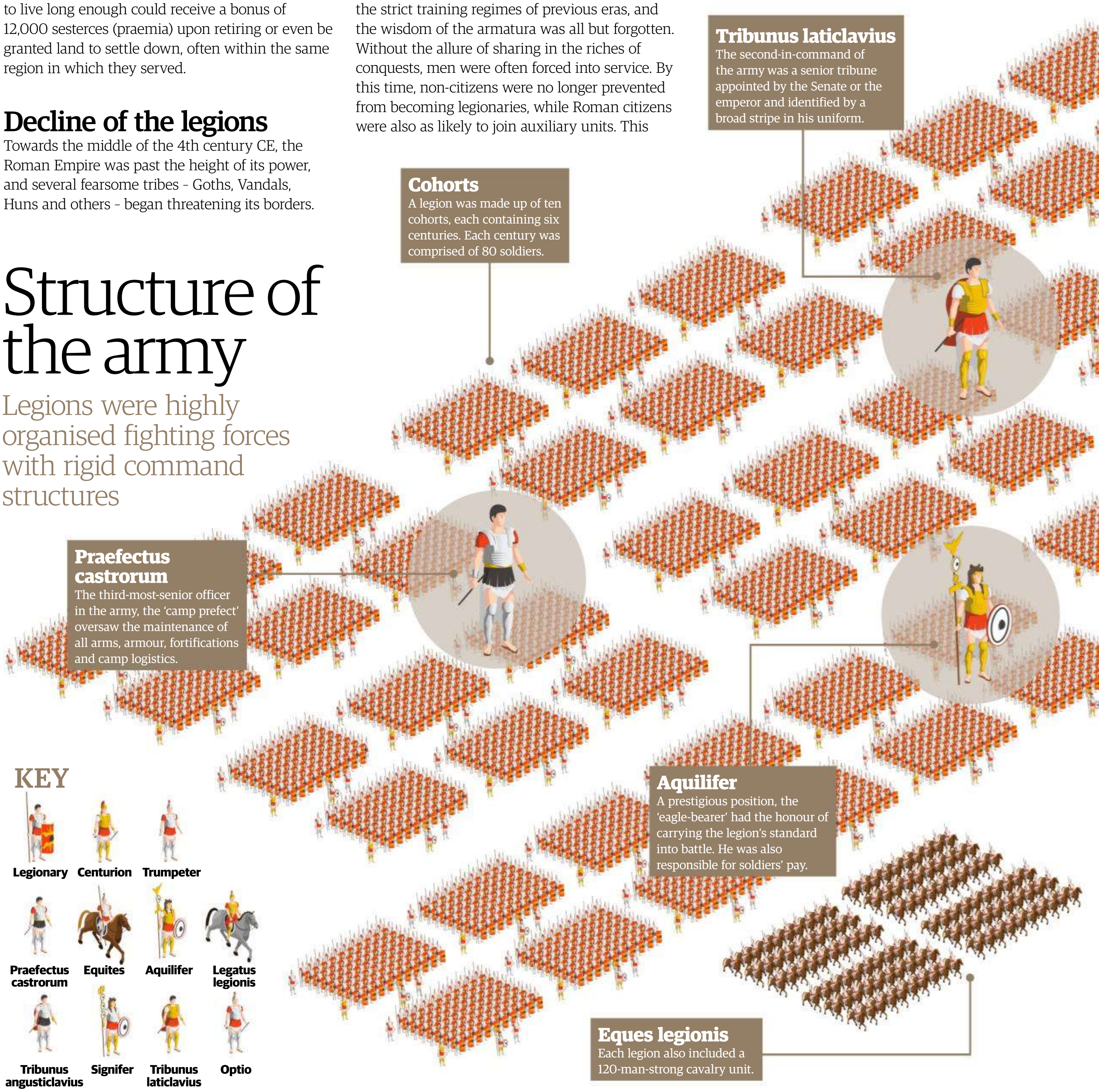
Decline of the legions

Towards the middle of the 4th century CE, the Roman Empire was past the height of its power, and several fearsome tribes - Goths, Vandals, Huns and others - began threatening its borders. Armies garrisoned at the furthest edges of imperial territory, such as in Britain, were marched back down the roads to defend Roman heartlands. By this period the legions had dramatically changed from the dominating forces of previous centuries.

Original height and age requirements were overlooked as recruiters struggled to fill the ranks to defend the empire. There was also little time for the strict training regimes of previous eras, and the wisdom of the armatura was all but forgotten. Without the allure of sharing in the riches of conquests, men were often forced into service. By this time, non-citizens were no longer prevented from becoming legionaries, while Roman citizens were also as likely to join auxiliary units. This meant that Rome's armies were no longer filled with men from the regions close to Rome itself but from among so-called 'barbarian' territories conquered by the empire, some even from beyond its borders. Although these new legions did achieve some victories, they paled in comparison to the elite fighting forces they once were.

Structure of the army

Legions were highly organised fighting forces with rigid command structures



Tribunus laticlavius
The second-in-command of the army was a senior tribune appointed by the Senate or the emperor and identified by a broad stripe in his uniform.

Cohorts
A legion was made up of ten cohorts, each containing six centuries. Each century was comprised of 80 soldiers.

Praefectus castrorum
The third-most-senior officer in the army, the 'camp prefect' oversaw the maintenance of all arms, armour, fortifications and camp logistics.

Aquilifer
A prestigious position, the 'eagle-bearer' had the honour of carrying the legion's standard into battle. He was also responsible for soldiers' pay.

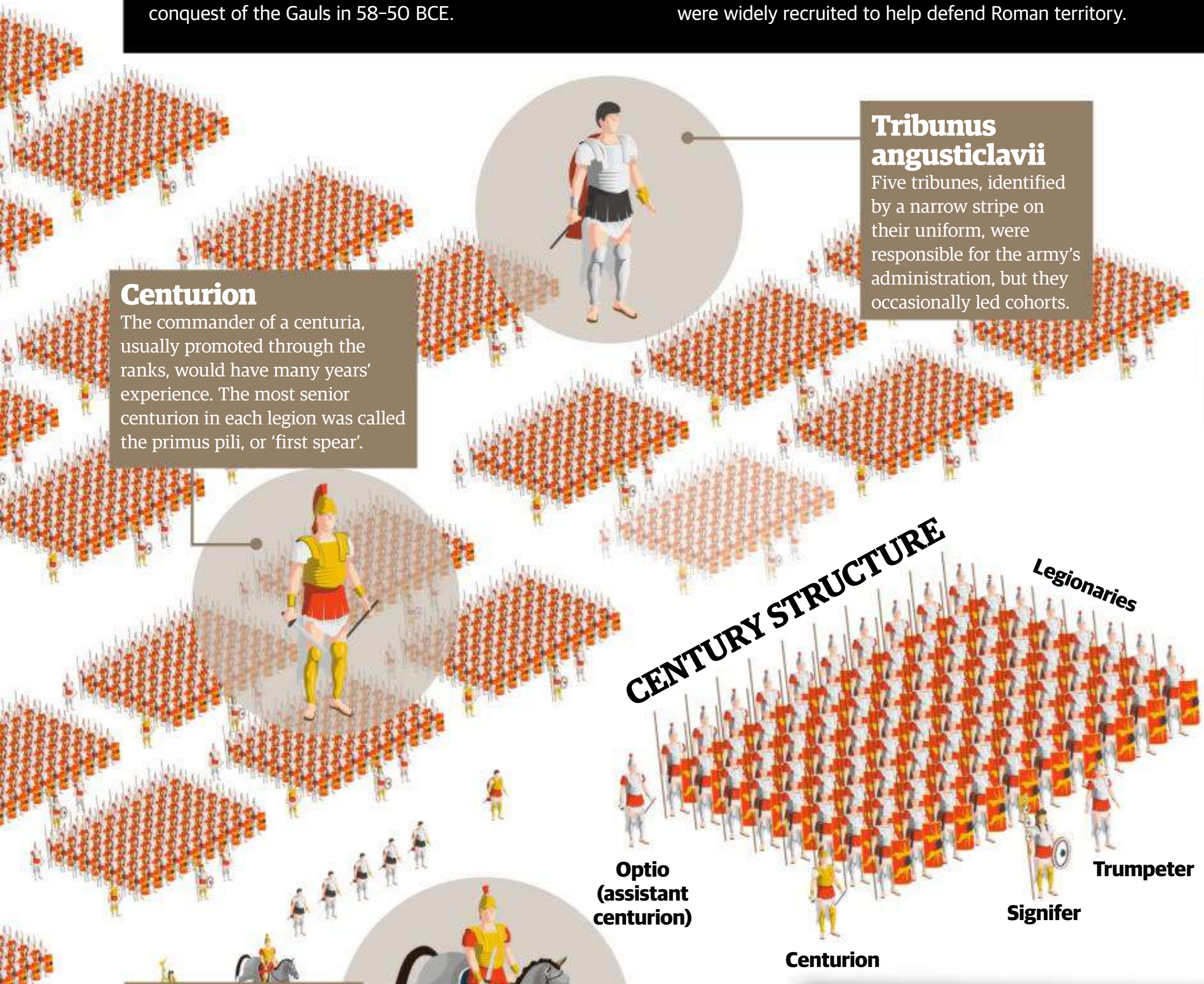
Eques legionis
Each legion also included a 120-man-strong cavalry unit.

Auxiliaries

Although heavy infantry formed the backbone of Roman armies, specialist troops such as archers, slingers and cavalrymen were also crucial on the battlefield. These units were largely recruited from conquered territories, such as Gaul, Greece, Germania and Britain. Archers from Crete, for instance, were renowned for their skill with the bow, while German cavalrymen proved instrumental during Caesar's conquest of the Gauls in 58–50 BCE.

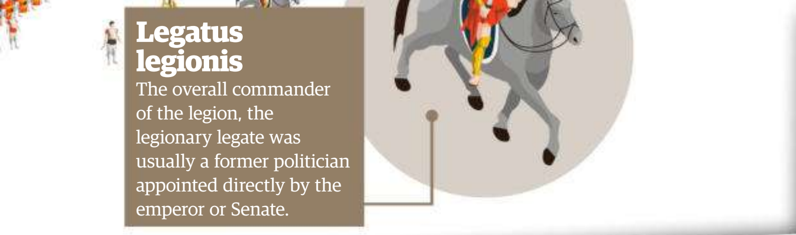
While auxiliary units were often raised and disbanded to meet the needs of a legion, the Romans became increasingly reliant on them. Unlike their legionary comrades, these men were not considered Roman citizens, but citizenship could be earned through lengthy service. As the empire began to decline, auxiliary and legionary units became almost indistinguishable. Eventually, non-citizens were widely recruited to help defend Roman territory.

A depiction of an auxiliary infantryman from Rome's imperial period



Tribunus angusticlavii
Five tribunes, identified by a narrow stripe on their uniform, were responsible for the army's administration, but they occasionally led cohorts.

Centurion
The commander of a centuria, usually promoted through the ranks, would have many years' experience. The most senior centurion in each legion was called the primus pili, or 'first spear'.



Legatus legionis
The overall commander of the legion, the legionary legate was usually a former politician appointed directly by the emperor or Senate.

ROMAN LEGION

Recruitment requirements

1 Citizenship
Only a citizen of Rome could become a legionary. Freed or current slaves were not permitted to join the ranks, although this rule was relaxed as the needs of the army changed.

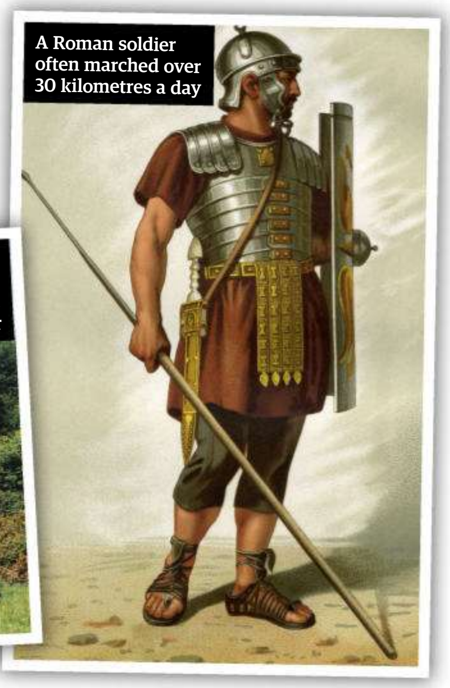
2 Height
Recruits were expected to be a minimum height of 1.72 metres (5 foot 6 inches), though for some roles taller men were required. However, it's thought this rule was not always strictly followed by the military recruiters.

3 Age
Boys as young as 17 could join the ranks, and men generally aged anywhere up to their mid 20s would be accepted. In desperate times, this maximum age was extended to 35.

4 Education
Although the ordinary soldier did not need any education, those wishing to gain officer posts needed basic numeracy and literacy skills.

5 Strength
Most important was the recruit's health, stamina, eyesight and strength. Soldiers incapable of carrying out the highly physical tasks demanded of them were often discharged from the army.

A re-enactment shows a centuria on the march, led by a centurion, signifers and a trumpeter

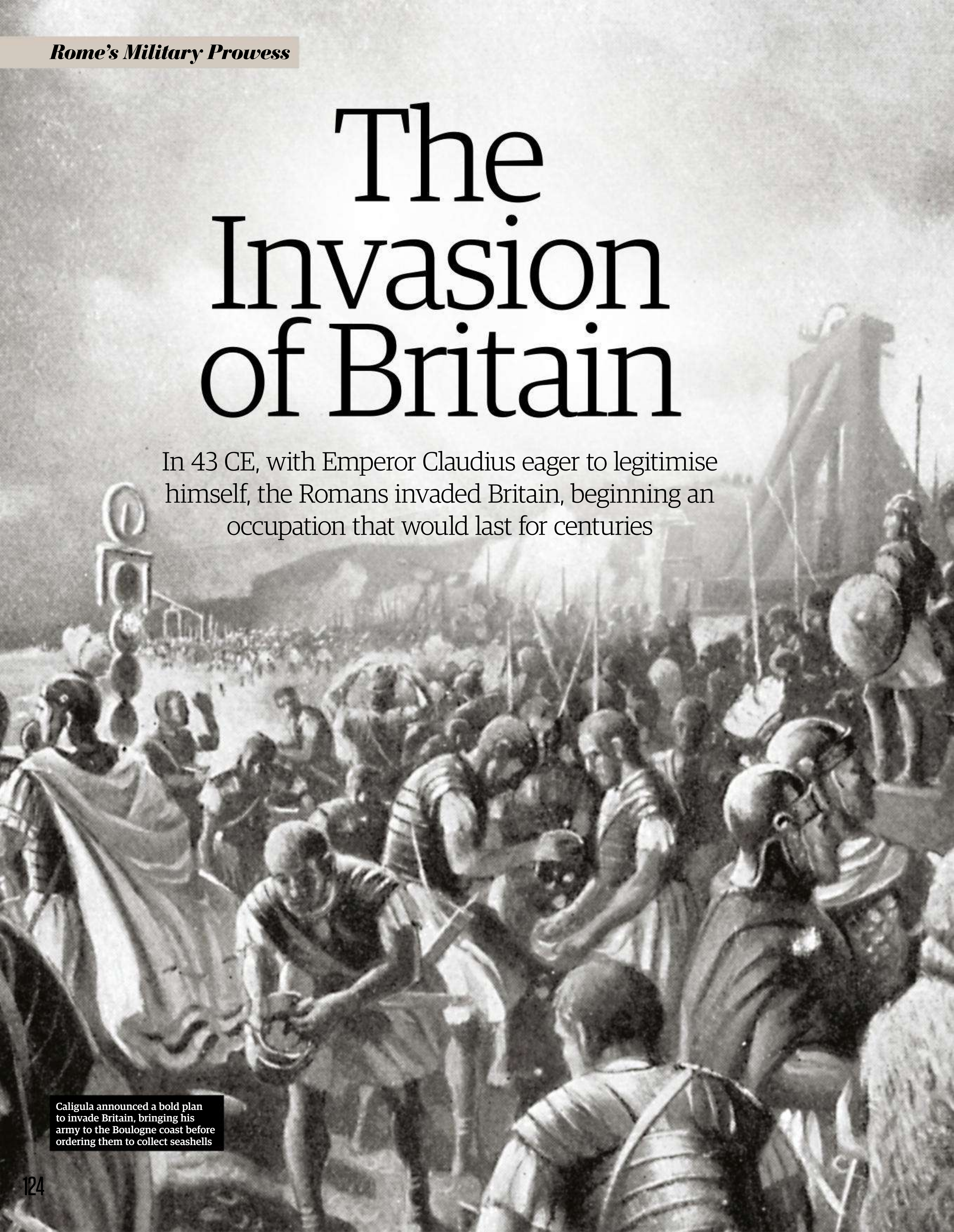


A Roman soldier often marched over 30 kilometres a day

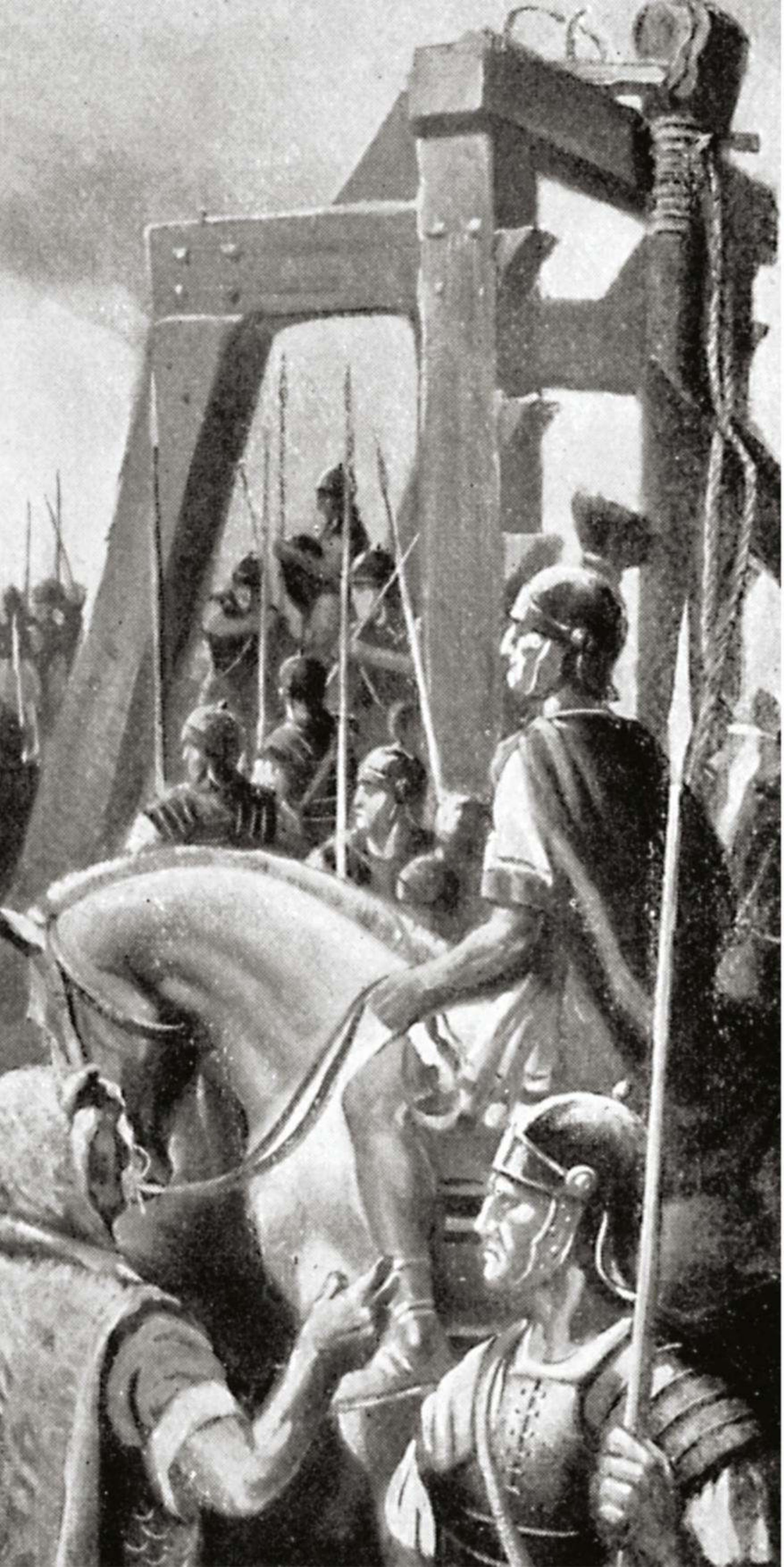
© Getty, Alamy (Roman soldier), Getty Images (re-enactment, auxiliary infantryman), Ed Crooks (illustrations)

The Invasion of Britain

In 43 CE, with Emperor Claudius eager to legitimise himself, the Romans invaded Britain, beginning an occupation that would last for centuries



Caligula announced a bold plan to invade Britain, bringing his army to the Boulogne coast before ordering them to collect seashells



Before the time of Julius Caesar, the Romans considered Britain an insignificant island of barbarians, stagnant at the edge of the world. Much of the country was untamed wildland, with only a few pockets rendered fruitful by great effort. It was known as a land of petty kings ruling fractured realms sitting precariously side by side. The southern straits of Dover had seen an influx of Belgic Gauls, first looting, then settling. Now they dominated the southeastern coast, boasting the island's most advanced civilisation.

By 54 BCE, despite having twice invaded Britain, learning much of the land and its people, Caesar returned with little to show for it. With even the mighty Caesar unable to subjugate the island, no sovereign attempted it again for quite some time. Emperor Augustus had thrice sought to invade but had more pressing matters to attend to, and though Emperor Caligula had stationed troops along the English Channel, his intent was rendered moot by his ineptitude, the tyrannical ruler famously stationing his men on the opposite side of the Channel before ordering them to collect seashells.

Enter Claudius. Once the butt of the Roman court's jokes, the accidental emperor was thrust into power in 41 CE by the praetorian guard after they murdered his nephew Caligula. Though he was made emperor by default, he sought to do the empire justice. But first he would have to win over his detractors, who were long amused by his limp, speech impediment and lack of military glory. In the hitherto unconquered Britain, Claudius saw a chance to prove himself a true Roman, a martial prince worthy of the purple.

Thanks to Caesar's exploits, the island was now known to be rich in tin, iron, food and potential slaves. The timing could not be better. With the Rhine, Danube and Iberia secured, Claudius had four new legions to spare. Meanwhile, anti-Roman sentiment was sweeping across Britain, with pro-Roman leaders overthrown and exiled. Sensing it was time to project his might, Claudius amassed an invading force of 40,000, which like Caesar's set off from Boulogne at night for east Kent.

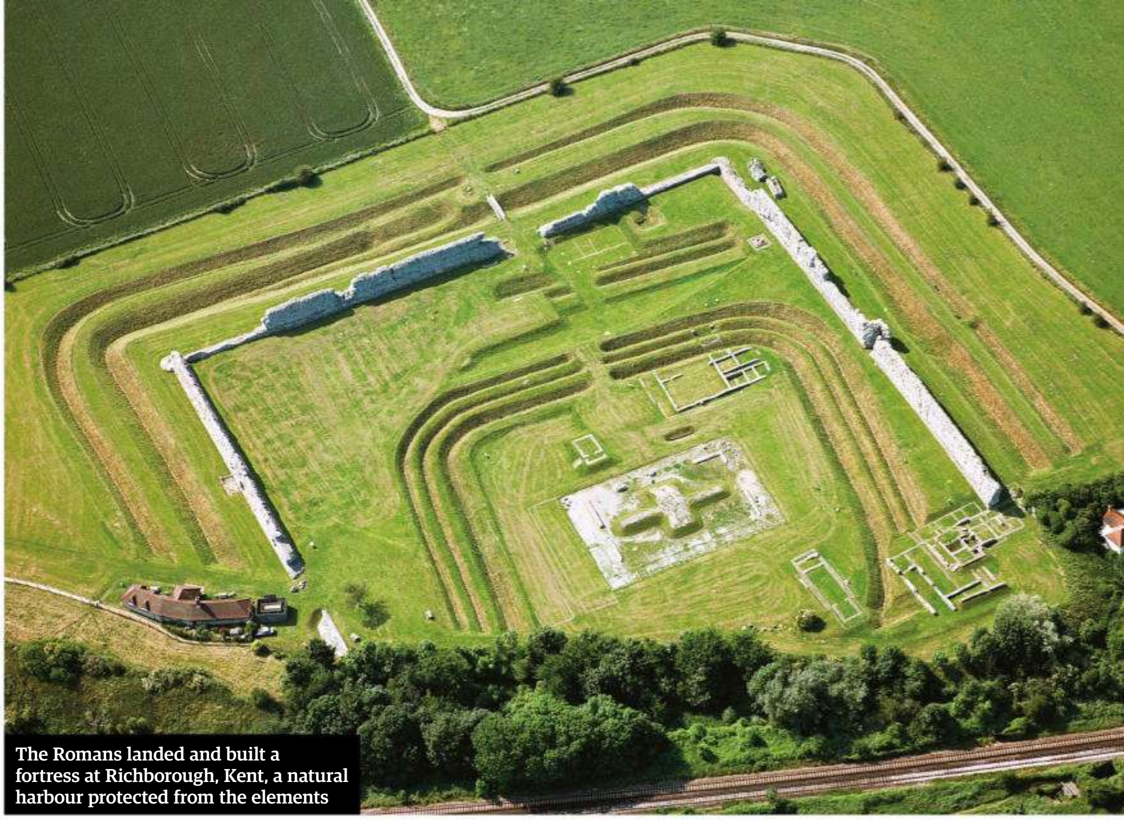
Once again an invasion of the island did not start out well. Upon receiving their commands, the army, led by senator Aulus Plautius, flat out revolted, refusing to leave Gaul and risk their lives "outside the limits of the known world". Outraged and concerned, Claudius sent his chief secretary, Narcissus, on his behalf to quash the mutiny. However, the soldiers simply jeered him with derision. Fortunately, the mood would not last and the soldiers were eventually sufficiently roused, agreeing to set sail for Britain. In order to maximise his mobility, Plautius divided his fleet into three contingents. This had the additional benefit of confusing the Britons about where they might land. They eventually settled on Richborough, a crescent-shaped natural harbour behind the Isle of Thanet that was helpfully protected from the elements.

However, they need not have been so cautious – between Caligula's laughable 'invasion' years earlier and the recent mutiny, the Britons had not taken the threat seriously enough to prepare. At the time, the island was split into a number of petty kingdoms, confederations and tribes begrudgingly existing in uneasy harmony. While King Epaticcus ruled in Silchester, Hampshire, to the west was the Durotriges, a Belgic tribe centred around Dorset. Elsewhere, the Belgic Regni ruled in Sussex, while the Iceni held East Anglia. Further afield, there were numerous tribes, such as the Dobunni, Coritani, Brigantes and Dumnonii, all of whom enjoyed varying levels of independence.

Undoubtedly, the most powerful kingdom was located in the southeast: Camulodunum. However, despite its firm grip over what is today Essex, mighty King Cunobelinus had recently died and his realm had been precariously split between two of his anti-Roman sons, Togodumnus and Caratacus, who were too busy plotting against each other to pay any mind to the Romans.

The invasion caught Camulodunum off guard, and rather than risk it all in open combat they made for the woods, opting for a campaign of guerilla warfare and light skirmishes. Yet instead of joining forces and grasping the single chance they had of stemming the Roman advance they chose to go out on their own. Just as Claudius hoped to earn a name for himself, both brothers deemed the arrival of an invasion force as their big chance to stake their claim – everything was on the line.

Though the pair avoided the Romans for some time, Caratacus, the more gifted of the two, was able to reach Kent first, giving him a chance to pick his battlefield and the best defensible position on it. Despite his thorough preparations the Romans made short work of his men, quickly routing them. In pursuit, Plautius encountered the army of Togodumnus and utterly annihilated it. Instead of taking hostages, as Caesar had previously done, Plautius simply left behind forts in all his conquered territories, along with small contingents, and moved on – a hallmark of Tiberius' campaigns in the north.



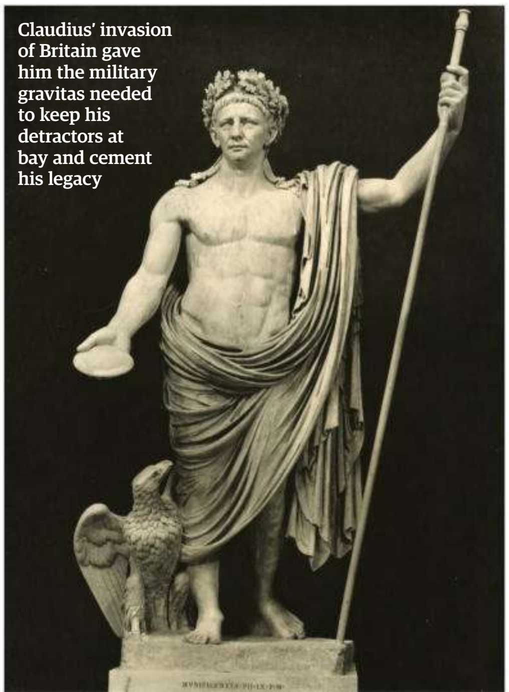
The Romans landed and built a fortress at Richborough, Kent, a natural harbour protected from the elements

To the Britons it soon became clear that their only hope of holding back the Romans would be together. Now, rather than engaging in petty squabbling over their boundaries, they faced a megalithic power that threatened to consume them all. The armies of northwest Kent and beyond the Thames positioned themselves in the wooded hills along the River Medway. They bolstered their armies with the survivors from the ranks of Caratacus and Togodumnus. To limit the Romans' options they destroyed the bridge at Rochester.

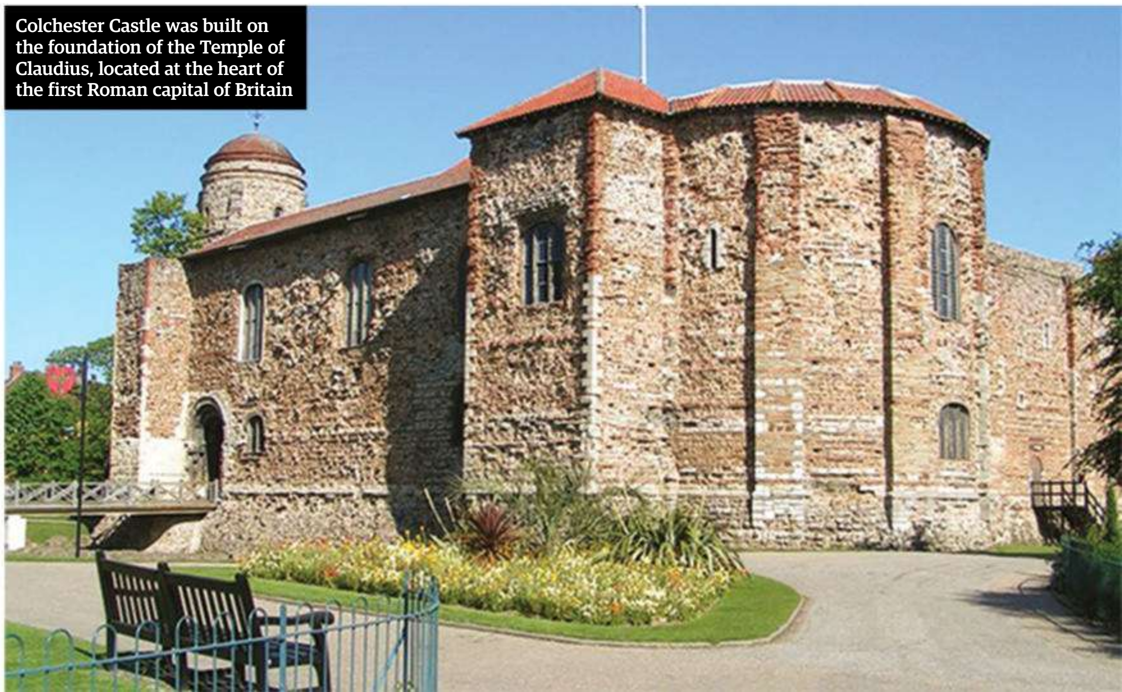
Plautius' veteran German cavalry from the Rhine was undeterred. Used to crossing turbulent waters, they had no trouble fording the now unguarded river. Sneaking around the Britons' charioteers, they lobbed javelins and missiles at their horses, rendering them immobile. Simultaneously, future emperor Vespasian led the second legion upstream to a ford, crossed over and attacked from the right. Despite their best efforts, the Romans were repelled. The next day, however, having experienced the landscape and had a night to strategise, Plautius routed the Britons towards Dartford. It was a decisive victory – the combined might of the defenders had drawn a line in the sand and been roundly defeated.

The remaining Britons were chased across the Thames towards Camulodunum (Colchester), but when the Romans caught up, they turned and faced them again in the marshes of Lea Valley – initially catching them off guard. Despite some losses, from here Plautius faced a simple path to Camulodunum. However, he was under strict orders: at the peak of his campaign he was to feign desperation and invite the support of Claudius, who would swoop in, barge across the Thames and claim glory for himself. Now that time had come, and having exceeded expectations, he was forced to exaggerate his loss of cavalry in the swamps, seemingly begging Claudius for aid.

When Claudius arrived, he did so promptly and with great pomp. He was followed by an entourage of praetorians, heavy artillery and scores of elephants. It was an army unlike any the Britons had ever seen; if they had not sensed the gulf of power that lay between them and Rome, here it was, plodding across their land. Claudius marched



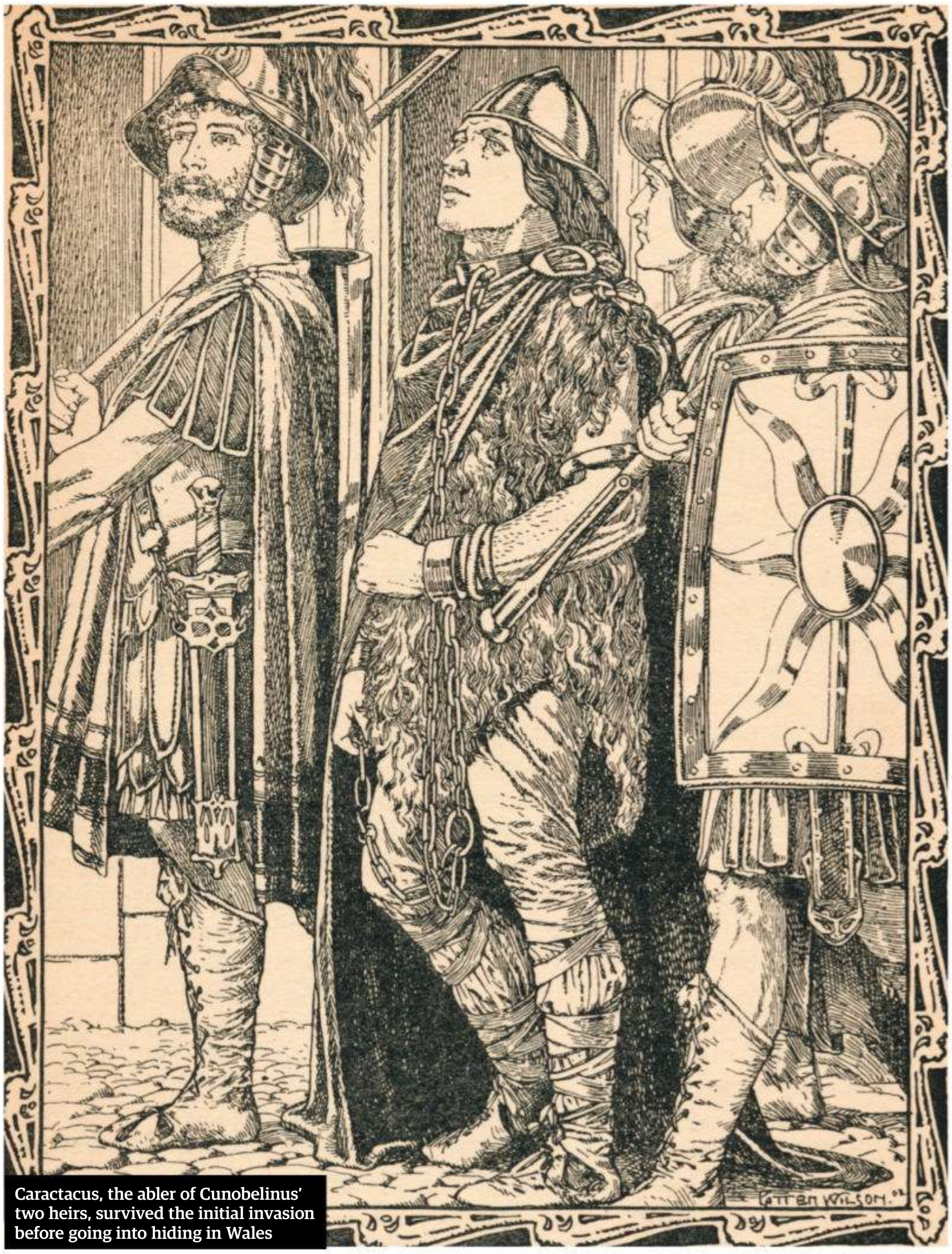
Claudius' invasion of Britain gave him the military gravitas needed to keep his detractors at bay and cement his legacy



Colchester Castle was built on the foundation of the Temple of Claudius, located at the heart of the first Roman capital of Britain straight for Camulodunum, seizing the town and outlining his plans for a peaceful occupation of the island. With Togodumnus dead and Caratacus in exile, their kingdom would become a Roman province, with Camulodunum the capital and Plautius the governor. Since Camulodunum was little more than a barbarian town, the Romans would build a city atop a hill to the southeast - the residence of the propraetor and seat of Roman government. The city centre would boast an epic temple erected to worship Claudius as a god.

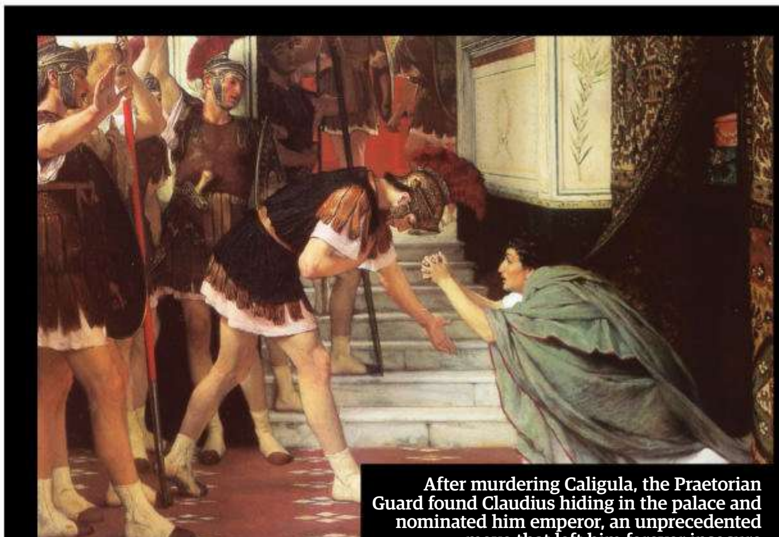
Meanwhile, a self-governing city was built for the Belgic Britons in a valley called Verulamium in modern-day Hertfordshire. Having observed the Roman dominance from the sidelines, Cogidubnus - king of the Regni of West Sussex and ruling from Chichester - rapidly paid tribute to Claudius, who lavished him with more land. Furthermore, he was made a Roman citizen and nominated Rex Legatus Augusti in Britannia - King and Lieutenant of Augustus in Britain. Under his authority, a temple was built to Neptune and Minerva, dedicated to the prosperity of the imperial family. Elsewhere, unwilling to fight the inevitable, Prasutagus, the king of the Iceni, also submitted to Rome, as did the Brigantes.

With a firm footing on the island, Claudius left for Rome, where he enjoyed a great triumph and was hailed as Britannicus. Arches were erected in Rome and Gaul and the conquest would henceforth be celebrated with a festival every year. While Dio claims the emperor scored a victory at the Thames, Suetonius says he never fought a single battle in Britain. Regardless, in just over two weeks, without spilling any blood himself, Claudius secured the capitulation of 11 kings. Even the king of the Orkney Islands, the other side of Caledonia, beyond Britain, swore fealty. Having secured southeast Britain, Plautius and his successor, Publius Ostorius Scapula, were left in charge of subjugating the rest of the island. However, first they would have to go through Caratacus, who was mustering resistance in the mountainous land of Wales even before the rise of the defiant warrior queen Boudica.



Caractacus, the abler of Cunobelinus' two heirs, survived the initial invasion before going into hiding in Wales

The emperor who won



After murdering Caligula, the Praetorian Guard found Claudius hiding in the palace and nominated him emperor, an unprecedented move that left him forever insecure

The nephew of emperor Tiberius and the grandson of Augustus' sister with Mark Antony, Claudius was of good stock. However, within the imperial family he was considered unsuitable for public office. Instead, he threw himself into history, writing 20 books about the Etruscans and eight on the Carthaginians. His mother and grandmother had to stop him from covering the Second Triumvirate for fear of scandal. Though his self-depreciating demeanour helped him survive both the tyrannical Tiberius and the maniacal Caligula, when the latter was murdered, Claudius found himself thrust into the purple.

For elevating, rather than killing, him, he gifted the praetorians 15,000 sesterces and an annual bonus of 100 sesterces thereafter. Having recalled many who had previously been exiled, after uncovering various plots against his life, his paranoia drove him to execute many more. Like Caligula, he had no military experience, a shortcoming that fuelled his invasion of Britain. He brought numerous senators along to witness it to distract them from plotting in his absence.

Within the empire, he held regular spectacles and was a prolific builder, constructing aqueducts and digging canals. He would later marry Agrippina, mother of Nero, and name her son as heir over his own, Britannicus. He died in 55 CE, most likely poisoned by Agrippina's hand.

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Crisis of the Third Century

For half of the 3rd century, the Roman Empire almost fell into its very own dark age of disease, invasion and civil chaos

As an empire, Rome grew bigger and grander than ever before. Its boundaries stretched halfway across the known world and at home, the position of emperor saw a single man wield the kind of power lesser citizens could only dream of. By the beginning of the third century, the Roman Empire was the most influential power base in Western civilisation and it had its eyes on even greater expansion.

But over the next few decades, the empire began to crack. The tribes of Germania and powerful Persian nations were attacking Roman borders with renewed vigor, while prominent figures within the army began competing for glory and status, creating a dangerous divide in the military. A devastating plague descended too, reducing the population and leaving piles of rotten bodies in the streets, while civil unrest saw uprisings, rebellions and a general sense of malaise pass over the Roman people. It was the closest that the Roman Empire ever came to devolving into its own Dark Age; half a century of chaos that very nearly destroyed the Roman dream forever.

Prior to the Crisis, Rome was enjoying something of a golden age. The ascension of Augustus and the creation of the empire under the Principate had ushered in 250 years of relative stability and steady expansion. 'Pax Romana' was the name it was given, but it would be a Roman Peace that would precede a far darker time to come.

As the 2nd century began to draw to a close, a now almost 1,000-year-old Rome found itself with a problem inherent to its imperial system of governance: the line of succession. There was no constitutional law to define how a new emperor should be chosen, something Augustus and his Julio-Claudian line circumvented by using adoption as a temporary means of identifying an heir. As the dynasties rose and fell, most emperors found their time as caesar drawn to a close on the dagger of a rival or via several blades belonging to the disgruntled Praetorian Guard. Some emperors died of natural causes, but most passed through the veil thanks to human assistance.

Eventually, it occurred to these men of status that the real power in the realm lay not with them, or with the Senate, but with the armies. The armies were an independent entity, one littered with generals who inspired an almost cultish following in their men. Should an emperor gain the support of the military, then his position atop the empire was assured, at least for the time being. This issue became all the more complicated when the armies started to become self-aware of their importance in the powerplays of the empire.

By 235 CE, the armies were exhausted. A long, bloody and seemingly endless war of attrition to protect Rome's continental borders from the hordes of the Germanic barbarians and the Persian warriors of the Sassanid Persian Empire had depleted the standing armies and left many of them despondent and embittered. The emperor of the time, Alexander Severus, did his relationship with the armies no favours when he decided to

The Sassanid Persian Empire proved a worthy adversary for the Romans in the East, especially during the turmoil of the Crisis

Claimants for the throne

During the chaos, the most powerful seat in the land became diluted due to the number of claimants. Over the course of roughly half a century, around 26 men were officially recognised by the Senate as emperor (and that's not counting the insurmountable number of claimants who made a vye for power without such an official endorsement).

So why were there so many? The Crisis of the Third Century was civil unrest on scale unseen in Rome since the days before it was united as a kingdom. Powerful families wanted to elevate themselves; generals from the army wanted to assume the seat of ultimate power and bring the realm to heel; and politicians simply wished to assume control of a once great and powerful nation.

Rome was also being assaulted, with a number of officially recognised emperors falling in battle or being captured by the enemy. If these claimants didn't fall in battle, they were often assassinated during the chaos that ensured for 50 years.

buy a form of peace with the Persians. Severus was already a poor leader when it came to finances, and the decision to use what little money remained in the treasury on what was essentially a bribe proved too much for some generals, and Severus was cut down by his own men.

Suddenly, the empire was thrown into a state of internal chaos as different key figures in the military presented their own candidates for the position of emperor. This soon descended into civil war as the most powerful and influential seat in the land became a bargaining chip for self-advancement. The Senate, ultimately powerless by this point, was forced to recognise whichever claimant presented the most forceful backing, and so began a pattern that would see 26 different men officially recognised as emperor.

> Inflation was one the period's largest problems, as the denarius went down to 40% silver

With the armies of Rome preoccupied with the politics of the realm, the empire no longer had the standing force it needed to repel the enemies that stood at its borders. To the West, the barbarian hordes resumed their attacks with a bloody vigor. The Vandals, the Goths, the Carpians and the Alamanni all made their attacks upon the Western reaches and laid waste to any settlement or trace of Roman infrastructure they encountered. The Rhine and the Danube Rivers were just one area the barbarians began to carve their pound of flesh from Rome's exposed flank.

This situation was, in part, Rome's own doing. It was a practice of Roman culture to hire portions of its armies from mercenaries beyond its borders rather than spend time training new soldiers from Rome's own stock. Campaigns came and went and the need to raise considerable manpower saw Rome create entire battalions made entirely of barbarian warriors. Those that survived returned to their homes with the training of the world's most disciplined military, and slowly those independent clans and tribes began to form into larger confederations.

The situation worsened to the East as the Persians of the Sassanid Empire continued to wear down the Roman forces there, putting a constant drain on the Empire's resources. And with Rome's generals embroiled in political power plays, the Persians encroached further and further into Roman territory. They were far more aggressive than the people that preceded them – the Parthians – and were capable of besieging castles and razing settlements.

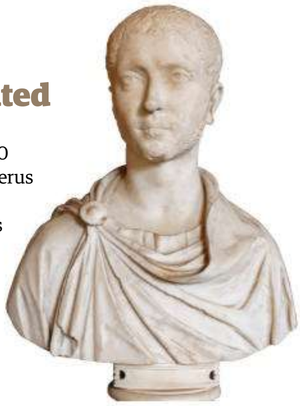
The situation worsened still as the currency of the land was gradually debased. The coin of the realm, the denarius, was once made of pure silver and served as the bedrock of the nation's economy. Over time, coinage had its silver reduced in favour of copper, and with it the denarius' worth began to plummet. By the beginning of the 3rd century, the denarius was down to 40% silver. By the time of the disastrous reign of Gallienus (253–68 CE), the currency was all but worthless as inflation soared.

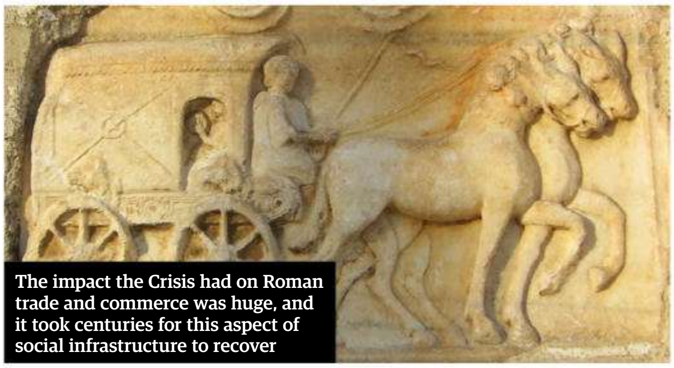
Defining moment

Alexander Severus assassinated

235 CE

Setting the precedent that will continue for the next 50 years of turmoil, the armies of emperor Alexander Severus turn on their leader when he attempts to buy a peace treaty with the Germanic horde. He is murdered by his own troops, who in turn name Maximinus Thrax (a popular general among the armies) as the next emperor. Thrax's reign continues for around three years, but invasions from barbarian forces continue to appear across the nation's boundary. News also reaches Rome of attacks by forces belonging to the Sassanid Empire.





The impact the Crisis had on Roman trade and commerce was huge, and it took centuries for this aspect of social infrastructure to recover

Timeline

235 CE

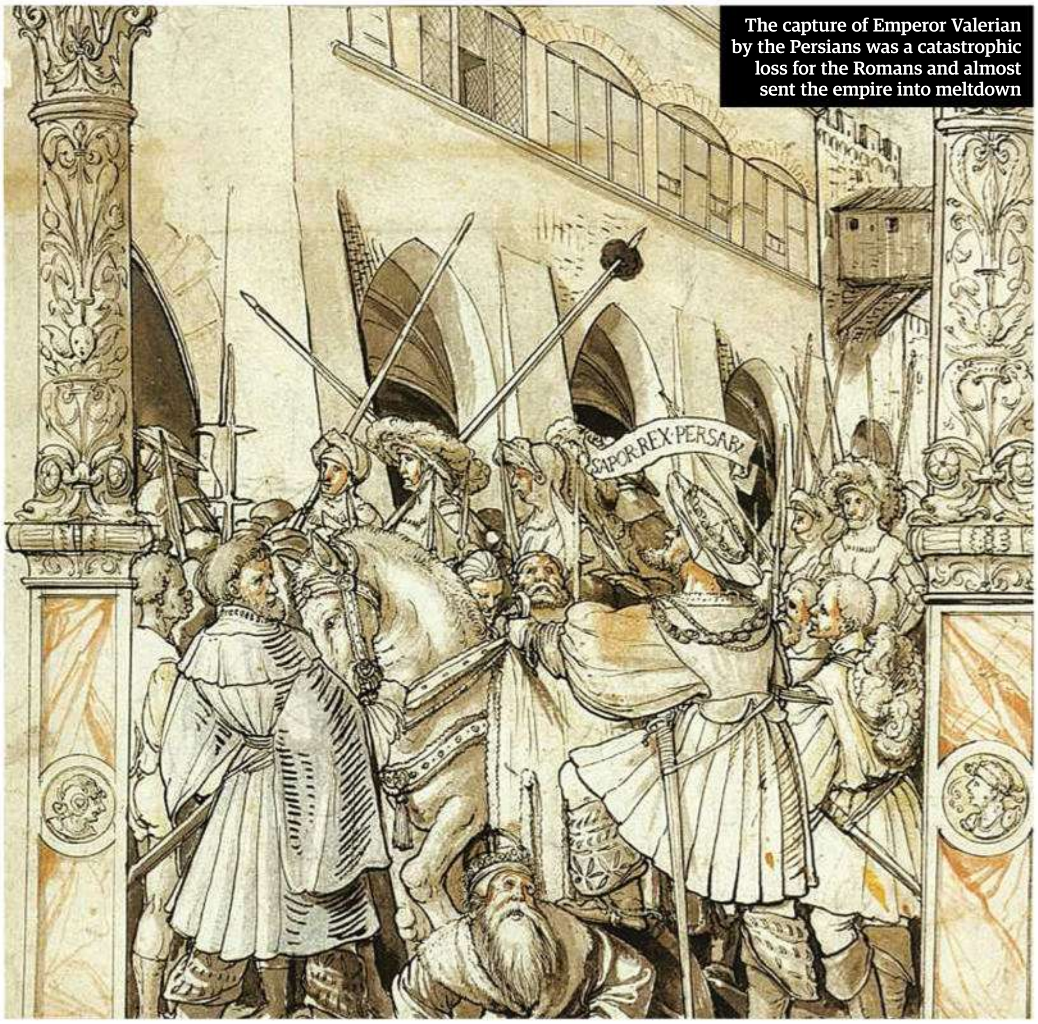
- **Maximinus is assassinated**
  The first emperor of the Crisis is murdered, perhaps by his own troops, and his death plunges the nation into a civil war to determine his successor.
  238 CE
- **Decius and Herennius Etruscus die**
  While fighting to drive back a horde of Germanic barbarians, co-emperors Trajan Decius and Herennius Etruscus are killed in battle. More civil unrest ensues following their deaths.
  251 CE
- **Emperor Valerian captured**
  In one of the most embarrassing episodes for the empire, Valerian is captured by the Sassanid Empire. Now a Persian prisoner of war, he is stripped of his title.
  260 CE
- **The Gallic Empire secedes**
  In the first of two territorial splinter incidents, Roman general Postumus rebels against emperor Gallienus and forms a new state, the Gallic Empire, in Gaul, Britannia and Hispania.
  260 CE
- **Aurelian defeats Quintilius**
  In 270 CE, two men are proclaimed emperor. Aurelian goes on to defeat Quintilius in battle, and the Senate soon recognises him as being the true ruler of the empire.
  270 CE

The Roman economy had been crippled, and now the state had no more money to pay the army.

Outbreaks of plague (most likely smallpox or measles) ravaged the populace of Rome, and for those that survived, the weight of taxation (the only means the Senate had to raise money for the defence of the empire) continued to crush a people already worn thin by the yoke of Roman Imperial life. Civil war raged like a wildfire and the face of the emperor changed constantly, sometimes in the matter of a few months.

When the emperor Valerian was captured by the Sassanids in 260 CE, the Roman Empire went into near meltdown. The seat of imperial power may have been a changeable one, but with the emperor himself now languishing in a Persian dungeon, Rome could not look any weaker. It was the dagger to the heart that caused one of the worst impacts of the Crisis – the sundering of Rome. Later that year, a Roman general organised a rebellion against the emperor in the Gallic states of Britannia, Gaul and Hispania. They broke away from Rome and formed the Gallic Empire.

In 267 CE, a Syrian queen by the name of Zenobia took advantage of the dwindling Roman presence in the region of Palmyra to secede from Rome and form an independent state known as the Palmyrene Empire. In the space of just a few years, the Roman Empire had splintered into three separate states with the rest of the realm left to bleed out between two rebellious new states. It was a disastrous era for the empire, and it marked the very lowest moment for the realm during the Crisis. The empire desperately needed a saviour. Someone to bring it together again.



The capture of Emperor Valerian by the Persians was a catastrophic loss for the Romans and almost sent the empire into meltdown

> "The Roman economy had been crippled, and now the state had no more money to pay the army"

Defining moment

Aurelian is assassinated

275 CE

While he only reigns for five years, the aggressive military tactics of Emperor Aurelian see him manage to reunite the three separate realms. Most of the time he has the support of the military and is swift in his decisions to drive back the barbarians at every chance he has. He also oversees the creation of the Aurelian Walls, a large boundary that surrounds the city of Rome, in case a barbarian invasion ever reaches the heart of the realm. However, in-fighting and distrust soon set in and his own Praetorian Guard murders him at the age of 65.

Defining moment

Diocletian ends the Crisis

285 CE

Diocletian, now with the support of the Eastern Army, faces the remaining emperor, Carinus, for the future the Roman Empire. His true nature and character are lost in history, mainly due to the propaganda Diocletian will use to sully his name and spread discord among his supporters. We don't know whether Carinus dies in battle facing his rival or is murdered by his own people. The latter, based upon previous examples, does seem the most likely since Diocletian quickly gains the support of both of the Eastern and Western armies and the Senate. His overwhelming support helps bring an end to the Crisis.

285 CE

Aurelian retakes the Palmyrene Empire
After a year of war to reunite the splintered Roman Empire, Aurelian finally defeats the rebel queen Zenobia by starving her out of her palace in Syria. The Palmyrene Empire comes back under control of Rome.
273 CE

The Gallic Empire falls
In another campaign to reunite the realm, Aurelian sails for Britannia and defeats ruler Tetricus I, bringing Gaul and Britannia back into the Roman Empire.
274 CE

Emperor Florianus is assassinated
In one of many military-driven changes of leader, a revolt by the army leads to the assassination of Emperor Florianus after a mere three months of rule.
276 CE

Emperor Probus is assassinated
Florianus' successor, Probus, reigned longer (a respectable six years considering the violent turmoil of the era), but he too is eventually deposed and murdered in a military revolt.
282 CE

Diocletian starts a revolt
Cavalry commander Diocletian starts a revolt upon hearing of the death of the co-emperor Numerian in battle. He has the support of the powerful Eastern army.
284 CE

Anatomy of the Crisis

The Gallic Empire
260 – 274 CE

The provinces of Britannia, Hispania and Gaul broke away from the empire in 260 CE amid the turmoil of the Crisis and formed a new state – the Gallic Empire. The breakaway was organised by Postumus, a Roman general who grew tired of Rome's inability to deal with the multiple invasions by Barbarians. Germania and, for a time, Hispania were added to its territories, before Postumus' assassination in 268 CE and its reunification in 274 CE.

Palmyrene Empire
270 – 273 CE

Centered in the ancient Semitic city of Palmyra, the Palmyrene Empire was a splinter state that seceded from Rome in 270 CE. The state consisted of the Roman territories of Syria Palaestina, Arabia Petraea, Egypt and parts of Asia Minor and operated independently for three years before a series of internal rebellions left the door open for emperor Aurelian to destroy Palmyra and retake the territories. It was presided over by Syrian queen Zenobia and her family.

The Roman Empire
235 – 284 CE

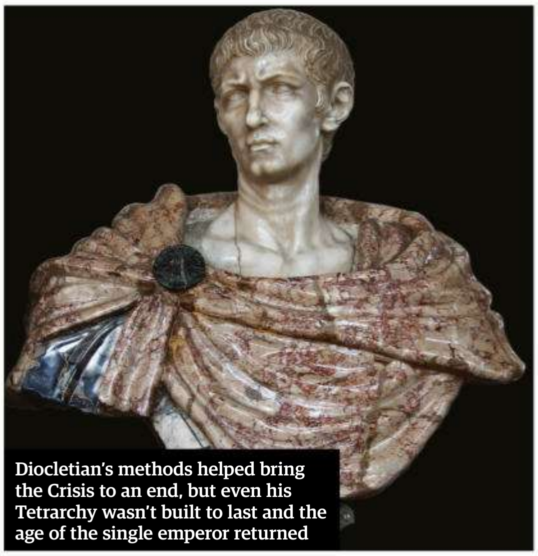
Of the three states, the independent Italy-centred state of the Roman Empire was the largest and most powerful. It was also the one with the most chaos and civil unrest. The fightback began in 268 CE when Emperor Claudius II Gothicus drove back the Germanic tribes of the Armanni and retook Hispania from the Gallic Empire. Aurelian then took over the fight and retook all of the splintered territories.

Britannia
259 CE

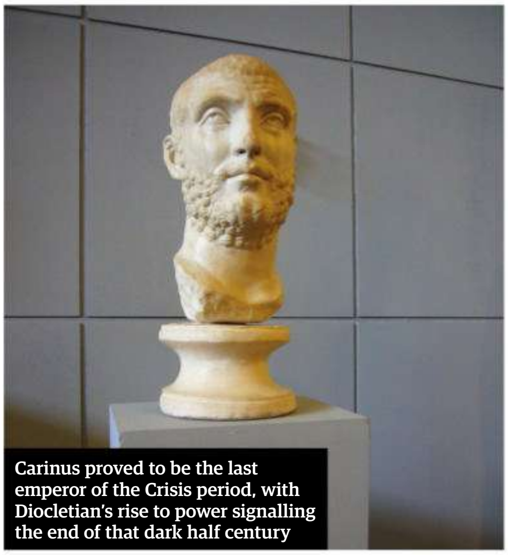
While the rest of the Roman Empire was besieged by barbarian invaders – especially the Goths, who poured into Roman territories from multiple vantage points – Roman Britain managed to avoid most of these invasions due to its separation by water. For a time, Britannia had become a relatively peaceful place but the crises elsewhere caused an inflation which in turn created economic uncertainty among its peoples. When the Roman general Postumus (who was based in Britannia) rebelled against emperor Gallienus, Britannia became a renewed priority.

Aegyptus
269 – 264 CE

The Roman province of Egypt was a key territory in the Roman Empire, and due to its production of grain it, was also the wealthiest. The territory was originally taken by Zenobia during her rebellion that led to the formation of the Palmyrene Empire. Zenobia claimed an ancestral link to Cleopatra VII and Egypt as a whole, and it was the loss of this particular realm that galvanised Aurelian to retake it so swiftly.



Diocletian's methods helped bring the Crisis to an end, but even his Tetrarchy wasn't built to last and the age of the single emperor returned



Carinus proved to be the last emperor of the Crisis period, with Diocletian's rise to power signalling the end of that dark half century

The military became the key player in the political makeup of the Crisis, which led to much of the civil unrest and infighting

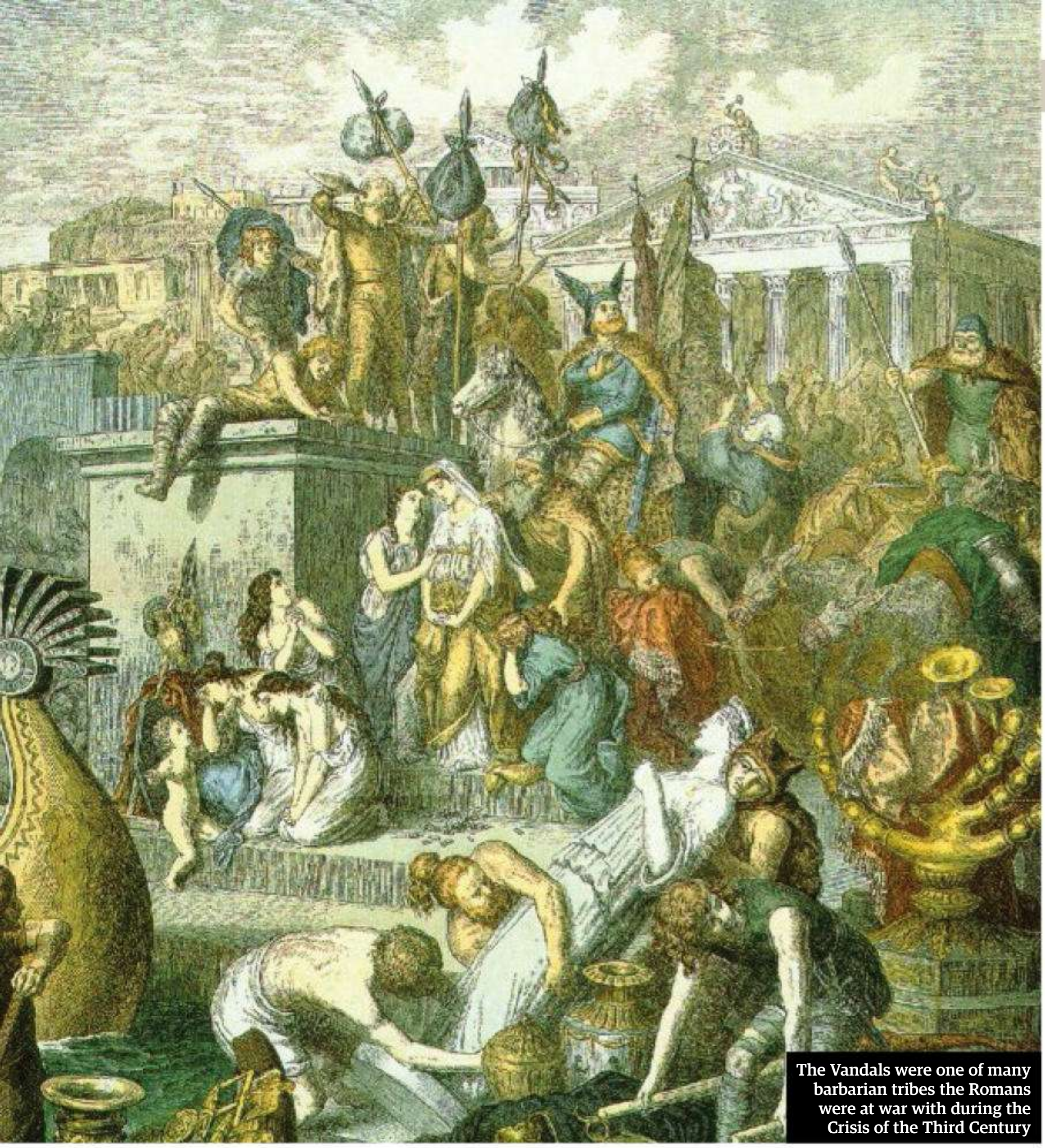
> "Even with much of the realm now restored, the empire was still in distress"

In fact, Rome needed two men, and the first would come in the form of a man named Aurelian. His predecessor, Claudius II Gothicus, had spent two years successfully suppressing the invading barbarians and had even won Hispania back from the wayward Gallic Empire, but fell to the Cyprian Plague in January 270 CE. Before his death, he named his closest commander, Aurelian, as his successor, but his brother Quintillus soon attempted to seize power. However, the armies did not recognise Quintilius' claim, and Aurelian quickly defeated him in battle and received the full backing of the Senate.

With the full confidence of his armies (a rarity in that era) and the efforts of his predecessor still ringing on the battlefield, Aurelian wished to reunify the empire straight away, but the realm was bleeding from wounds on every side and was in dire need of protection. Firstly, he drove the Sarmatians, the Vandals and the Juthungi from the boundaries of Rome before going on to defeat the Iuthingi barbarians from the north who threatened to reach as far into Italia as Rome. With the support of his legions, Aurelian proved a worthy commander and an emperor that was not afraid of leading a battle charge. However, he understood the need to present a symbol to the people of Rome that the city was safe while he was ruler – so the Aurelian Walls were constructed around Rome as a means of protecting against a potential future siege.

By 272 CE, Aurelian's attention turned to the concept of reunification and the seceded Palmyrene Empire. Hearing news of the impending Roman attack, Zenobia cut off the vital grain supply to Rome from Egypt, forcing Aurelian to march on Syria and retake the lost territories by force. Palmyra, the city in which Zenobia had taken refuge, proved difficult to besiege but Aurelian was willing to play the long game and after six months, a starving rebel queen and her son were finally forced to surrender.

Aurelian returned to Rome with Zenobia in chains and the grain stores of Egypt restored, a brief glimmer of positivity in an otherwise dark

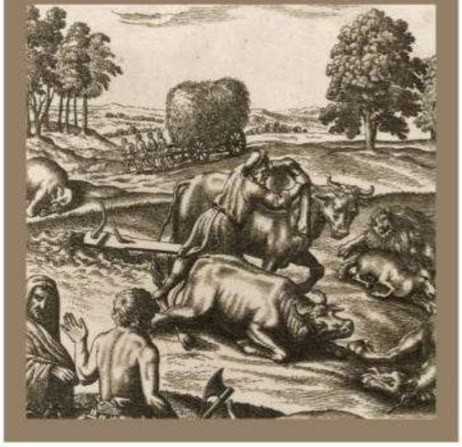


The Vandals were one of many barbarian tribes the Romans were at war with during the Crisis of the Third Century

The Plague of Cyprian

The Roman Empire suffered a number of destructive bouts of plague during its existence, one of which occurred during the Crisis of the Third Century. Known more commonly by historians as the Plague of Cyprian, this widespread pandemic was likely an outbreak of smallpox (a disease that would continue to ravage the world, especially during the Middle Ages to come). Cases are first documented some time during 250 CE and the plague raged for two decades, even claiming the life of one of the emperors, Claudius II Gothicus, in July 270 CE.

The plague itself affected everyone, from the Carthaginians to the Goths, and seemed to spread like wildfire according to Saint Cyprian, a bishop of Carthage who witnessed the outbreak. This has led some to believe it was either a new, virulent form of smallpox or the first instance of measles. Either way, it took over two decades for the disease to finally abate.



and despondent era. Two years later, Aurelian sailed to Britannia and finished his predecessor's work and brought the rebel state back into the Roman fold. Clearly his reputation as a fierce military commander preceded him and the self-proclaimed "Gallic Emperor" Tetricus I openly offered the territories of Gaul and Britannia back (although he refused to accept Aurelian as his leader). So when the armies of the two men met in the autumn at Châlons-en-Champagne, the Gallic leader simply left his own camp and walked into the Roman one. In the space of a mere two years, Aurelian had restored the empire.

Even with much of the realm now restored, the empire was still in distress. Plague had ravaged cities, towns and settlements – even districts of Rome were almost entirely deserted as the people sought safety from the pandemic. Some towns had been completely destroyed by barbarian attacks, while others had been simply abandoned for fear of a similar fate. The era of constant fear of invasion had made the once easy-going Romans a fearful lot – the creation of walls at the boundary of the kingdom and the rise of Aurelian's own defences around the city were signs of a people no longer confident in their own realm.

Aurelian eventually succumbed to the fate so many other emperors faced – assassination. In 275 CE, a conspiracy among some of his enemies led his own men to take his life. As as result, Rome was again plunged into civil war as the same cycle of military groups clashing over control of the throne continued. Six more men would take the Roman hot seat following Aurelian's murder and for another decade Rome knew no civil peace.

And then, in 284 CE, another influential figure made a claim for the title of emperor – a Roman general by the name of Diocletian. Unlike many figures before him, Diocletian had the support of the two largest military groups in Rome – the Eastern and Western Armies. A popular strategist and commander, Diocletian decided that the cycle of single despotic rulers at the seat of Rome was perpetuating the Crisis the realm had been mired in for half a century. And so, with the support of most of the empire's military might, Diocletian ousted the current emperor and was proclaimed the new leader by the Senate.

Diocletian then created a new form of governance – the Tetrarchy. The empire would be divided into four separate areas, each one governed by a single man, with all four meeting to discuss matters that pertained to the entire nation. The idea of providing elevated status to four of Rome's most powerful families appeased the warring nobility, and with the army on his side as well, Diocletian effectively brought the Crisis of the Third Century to an end in 284 CE.

However, much like the ruined settlements, broken walls and plague pits, Rome was scarred forever by the half-century of conflict and uncertainty. Over 100 years of coinage debasement had largely eviscerated the Roman economy and the once silver-filled denarius was dead. Trade soon reverted back to the use of gold.

Rome's trade infrastructure had also suffered during the Crisis. Previously, Rome had found much of its growth through its internal trade – where merchants from the empire would travel inwards and sell to their fellow Romans. With 50 years of civil unrest, the roads were no longer safe and these merchants rarely travelled. This led to many citizens buying locally or growing their own crops or wine, creating a self-reliance that ensured survival through the dark times but severely impacted Rome's wider trade economy. Rome would survive, it would endure, but it would carry the scars of the Crisis with it forever.

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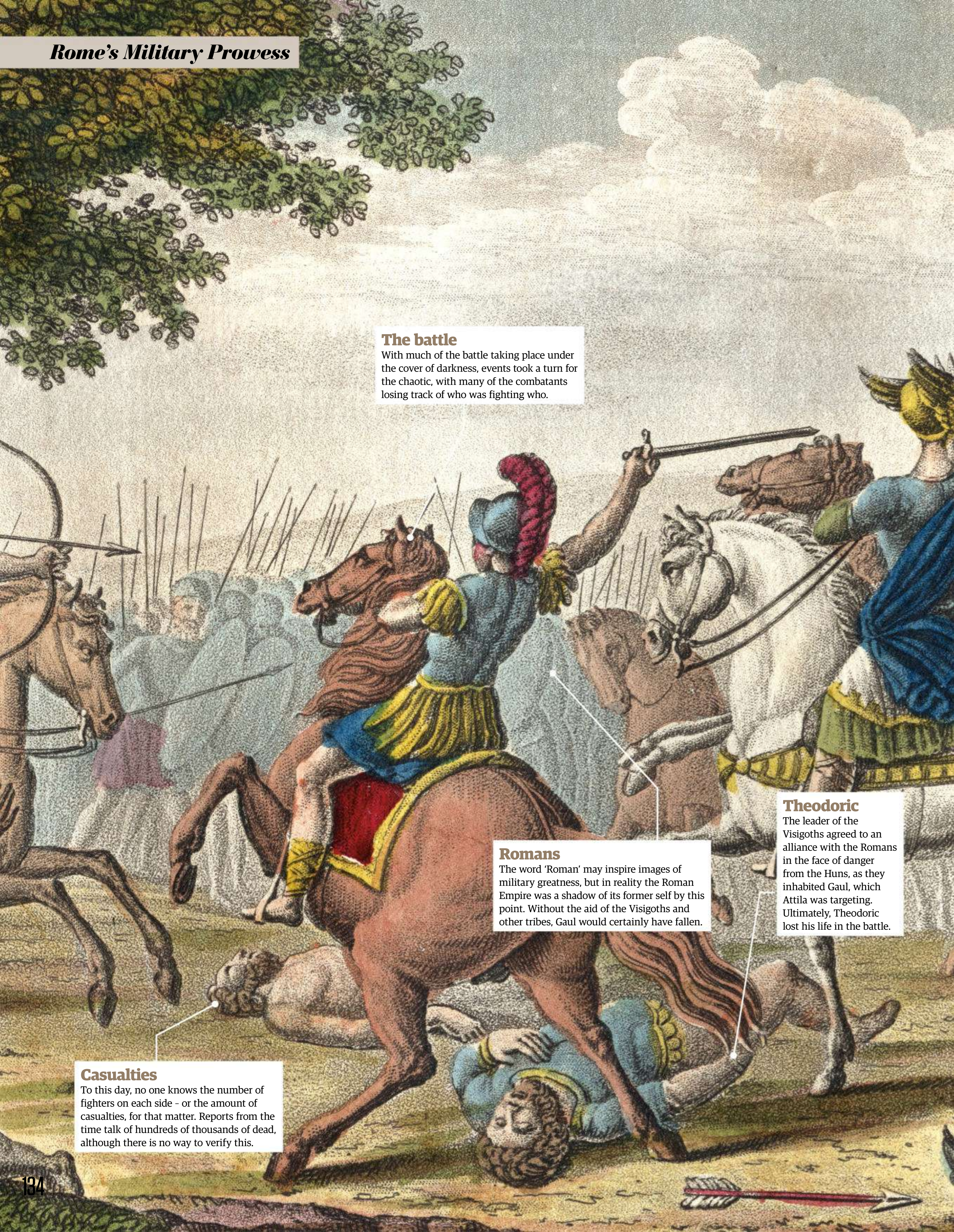


The battle

With much of the battle taking place under the cover of darkness, events took a turn for the chaotic, with many of the combatants losing track of who was fighting who.

Romans

The word 'Roman' may inspire images of military greatness, but in reality the Roman Empire was a shadow of its former self by this point. Without the aid of the Visigoths and other tribes, Gaul would certainly have fallen.

Theodoric

The leader of the Visigoths agreed to an alliance with the Romans in the face of danger from the Huns, as they inhabited Gaul, which Attila was targeting. Ultimately, Theodoric lost his life in the battle.

Casualties

To this day, no one knows the number of fighters on each side – or the amount of casualties, for that matter. Reports from the time talk of hundreds of thousands of dead, although there is no way to verify this.

The Catalaunian Plains

In one of the most legendary battles of all time, the Romans were faced with fighting the notorious Attila the Hun

The Battle of the Catalaunian Plains (or the Battle of Châlons, as it is sometimes referred to) in 451 played host to a skirmish between two opponents experiencing varying fortunes. On one side was the Roman Empire, a once-mighty force on the wane in the wake of constant assaults courtesy of increasingly powerful tribes from across Europe. On the other was one of the chief perpetrators of said attacks: Attila the Hun.

Known as "the scourge of God", Attila and his Huns inspired great fear, and for good reason. He and his tribe were renowned for how they swept through the eastern Roman Empire, laying waste to all in their path, indiscriminate of age, race or rank. And they were looking for a new target, ultimately settling on Gaul (now France). Although nominally counted as part of the Roman Empire, in actuality it was largely controlled by the Visigoths, who found themselves under threat from Attila. The barbarian rampaged through Gaul, with cities like Cologne, Mainz, Metz, Strasbourg and Rheims falling before the onslaught; he then lay siege to Orleans.

But the Romans had a man capable of facing the mighty Attila. Aetius was, by equal measures, a warrior and politician, having won numerous battles as a general, and served as chief political adviser to Valentinian III, the emperor of the Western Roman Empire. Having spent large parts of his youth growing up with Visigoths and even the Huns, he knew their ways. This experience, combined with his political and military nous, was to prove vital in not only defeating the latter, but in persuading the former to form an alliance with the Roman Empire. Thus, Aetius and his troops, along with an alliance of Visigoths led by King Theodoric I and groups of Alans and Burgundinians, made for Orléans.

As it turned out, they made it just in time, on 14 June, with Orléans on the verge of surrender. Despite the fact that his forces greatly outnumbered the Roman coalition, Attila ordered his troops to retreat in good order, preferring to face them in open battle rather than the confines of the city. Making camp near Châlons, he waited until the cover of darkness. All the while Aetius and his force remained in battle formation. On 20 June, the fighting commenced.

The battle was one of the bloodiest fought of that age. Although Attila took the early upper hand, ploughing through the soft centre of the Alans (purposefully placed there due to their unreliability), the Romans and Visigoths returned fire by attacking the flanks, turning the tide of the battle. With light returning and his life at risk, Attila again withdrew. Exact numbers of the dead (including Theodoric among them) are unknown, although some sources paint the figure as high as 200,000-300,000.

Faced with the opportunity to wipe out the Huns, Aetius stayed his hand. This has been attributed to the fact that the existence of a common foe in the Huns was the only reason their alliance with the Visigoths held, which they still needed to safeguard against further attacks from the Vandals in the south (who themselves had first mooted the idea of invading Gaul to Attila). The Huns would eventually return to ravage Italy, but for now, the future of the eastern Roman Empire was secured – thanks in large part to Aetius, the "last of the Romans".

Romans

TROOPS 50-80,000

Aetius

LEADER

A warrior and politician, Aetius was hugely popular, referred to as the "last of the Romans".

Strengths Tactically savvy and a strong warrior.

Weakness Outnumbered by the Hun forces.

Visigoth cavalry

KEY UNIT

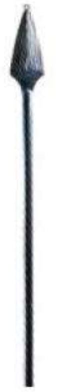
A vital component of the Roman alliance, they would prove to be decisive in the battle ahead.

Strengths Strong and difficult to cut down.

Weakness Could easily trample their own men.

Hasta

KEY WEAPON



A cross between a lance and a spear, the hasta was just one of the weapons employed by the Roman soldiers.

Strengths Useful for fending off assaults by cavalry.

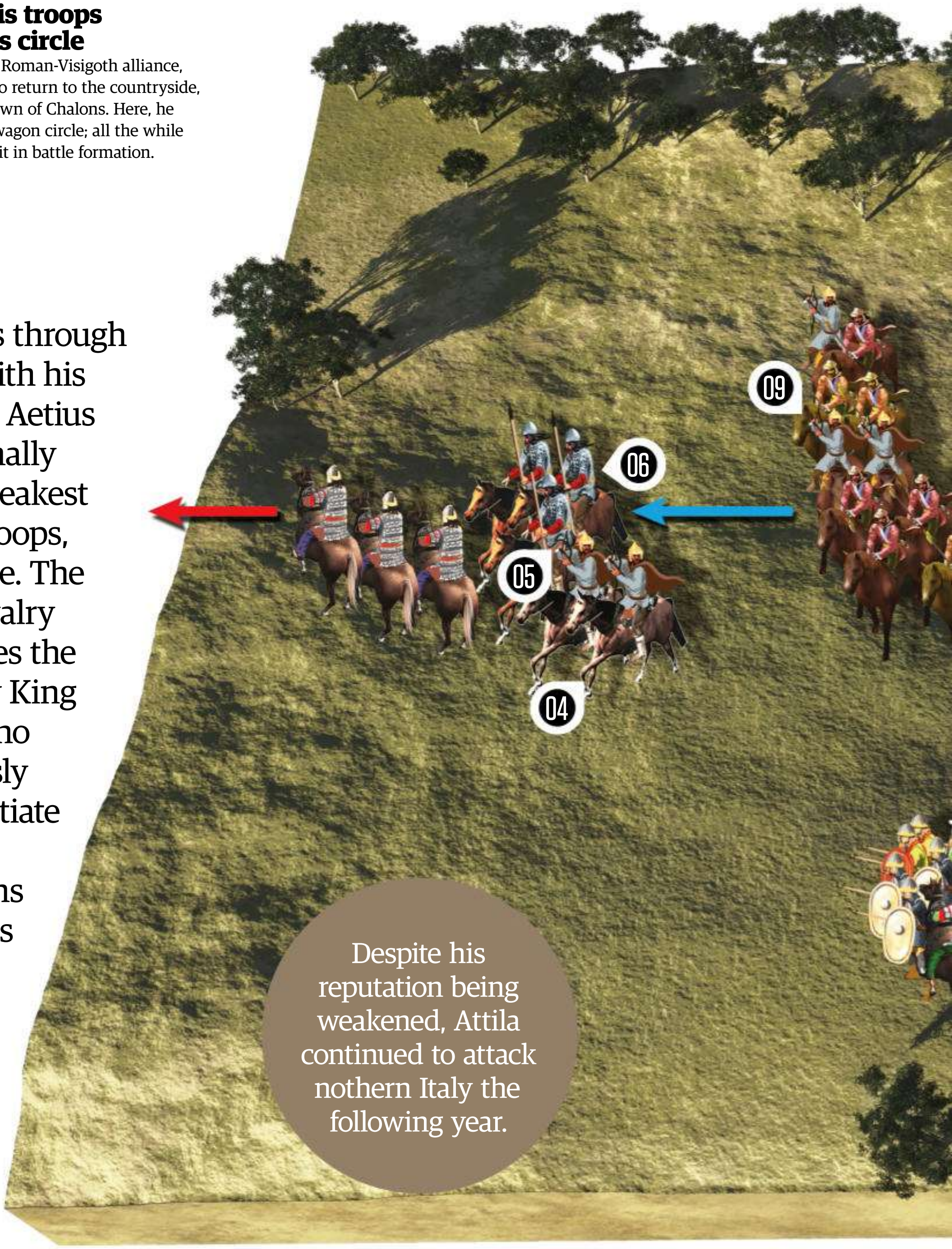
Weakness Could be unwieldy in close-quarters combat.

01 Attila and his troops withdraw to his circle

Seeing the arrival of the Roman-Visigoth alliance, Attila orders his troops to return to the countryside, setting camp near the town of Chalons. Here, he remains inactive in his wagon circle; all the while Aetius and his forces wait in battle formation.

02 Attila attacks

Attila attacks through the centre with his Huns, where Aetius has intentionally placed the weakest part of his troops, the Alan tribe. The resulting cavalry charge pushes the Alans, led by King Sangiban (who had previously tried to negotiate a surrender with the Huns while Orléans was under siege) back, with Attila following on in pursuit.



Despite his reputation being weakened, Attila continued to attack nothern Italy the following year.

03 Aetius counter-attacks

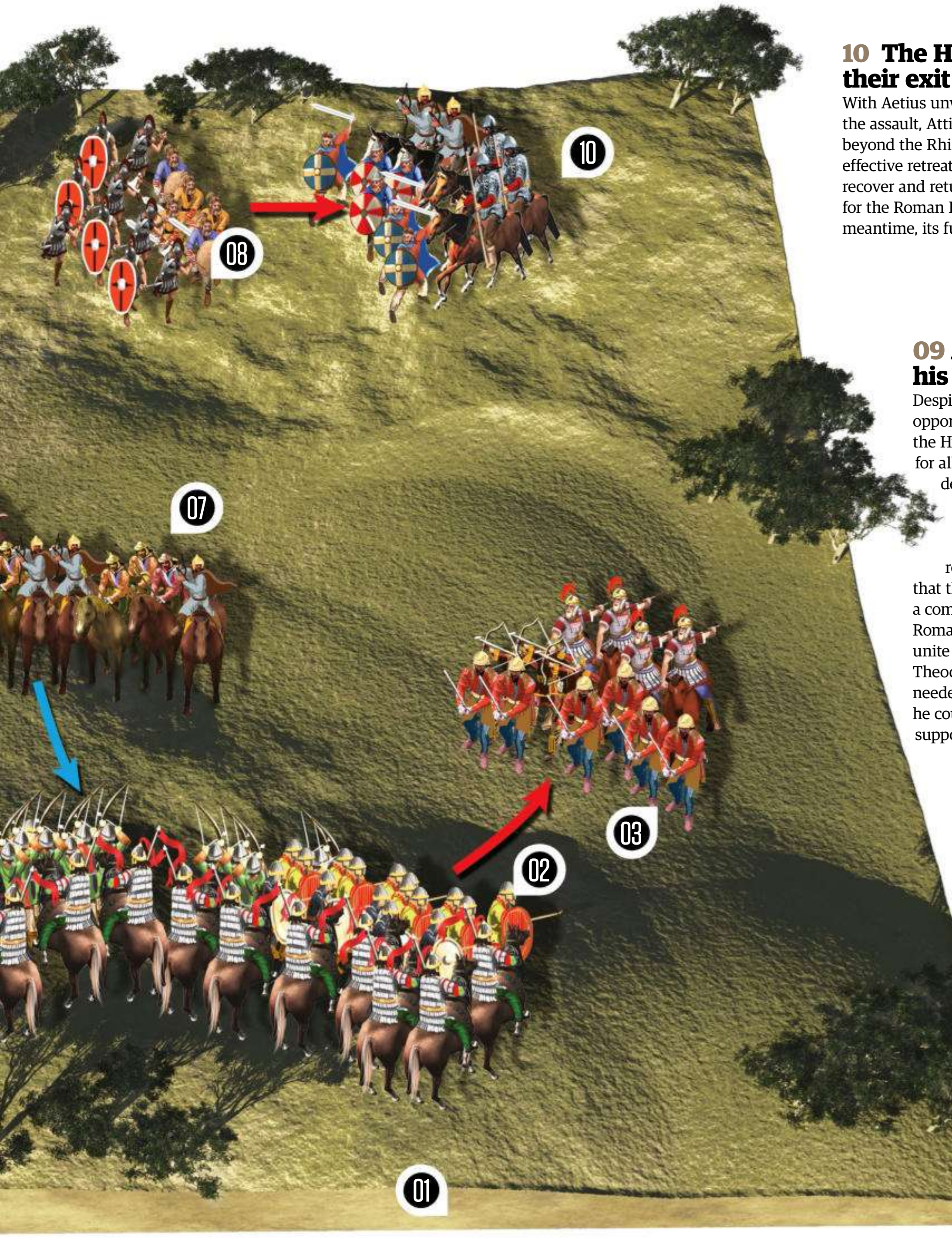
Aetius had kept the bulk of his strength on the flanks - commanding his Roman troops on the left, with Theodoric leading the Visigoths on the right. After Attila's initial assault, the Romans press the attack, attempting to prevent Attila from retreating back to his wagons. Despite assaulting Attila's forces, they lack the numbers to fully overwhelm the Huns.

04 The Visigoths strike

With the battle continuing well into the night, the fighting becomes increasingly desperate. Having initially been held up by strong resistance from the Huns, the Visigoths assault the flanks. Combined with the Roman assault, this turns the tide of the battle in Aetius's favour, with the Huns being pressed on both flanks and hemmed in, and denied the space that they need to fight.

05 Theodoric is killed

Tragedy strikes for the Visigoths. During the assault, Theodoric is de-horsed, before being trampled and killed by his own men. This was a blow for Aetius, with his strongest ally dead.



10 The Huns make their exit

With Aetius unwilling to press the assault, Attila takes his troops beyond the Rhine, making an effective retreat. He would later recover and return to make trouble for the Roman Empire, but in the meantime, its future was secure.

09 Aetius stays his hand

Despite having the opportunity to destroy the Huns once and for all, after a night of deliberation, Aetius opts against further pursuing the Huns. The likely reason for this is that the Huns provided a common foe for the Romans and Visigoths to unite behind, and with Theodoric dead, Aetius needed to be sure that he could count on the support of the Visigoths.

06 The Visigoths fight on

Despite the loss of their king and leader, the Visigoths fight on with renewed vigour, led by the fallen Theodoric's son, Thorismund. Thirsty for revenge, Thorismund leads a cavalry charge into the midst of Attila's forces, inflicting huge numbers of casualties in the process.

07 Chaos reigns

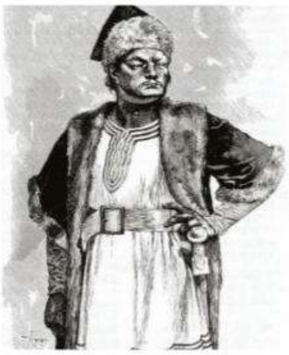
With the sun having set, there is much confusion, as both forces lose track of who is fighting who. In one instance, Thorismund mistakes the Huns for his own men, and is nearly killed himself as a result.

08 Attila retreats

Seeing that the tide of battle has turned against him and not willing to risk further losses, Attila retreats with his forces to his wagon circle, with his archers covering the retreating troops.

Huns

TROOPS 50-80,000



Attila

LEADER

One of the most feared military leaders of all time, he was determined to invade Gaul.

Strengths A cunning and strong warrior, commanding a huge force behind him.

Weakness Tactically out-manoeuvred by Aetius.

Huns

KEY UNIT

One of the most formidable – and feared – tribes in Europe, wherever they went they left destruction in their wake.

Strengths Brave and fearless warriors in battle.

Weakness Gung-ho nature left them particularly liable to be caught out tactically.

Bow and arrow

KEY WEAPON

Used to great effect to cover the Hun retreat, they were especially lethal against any mounted cavalry.

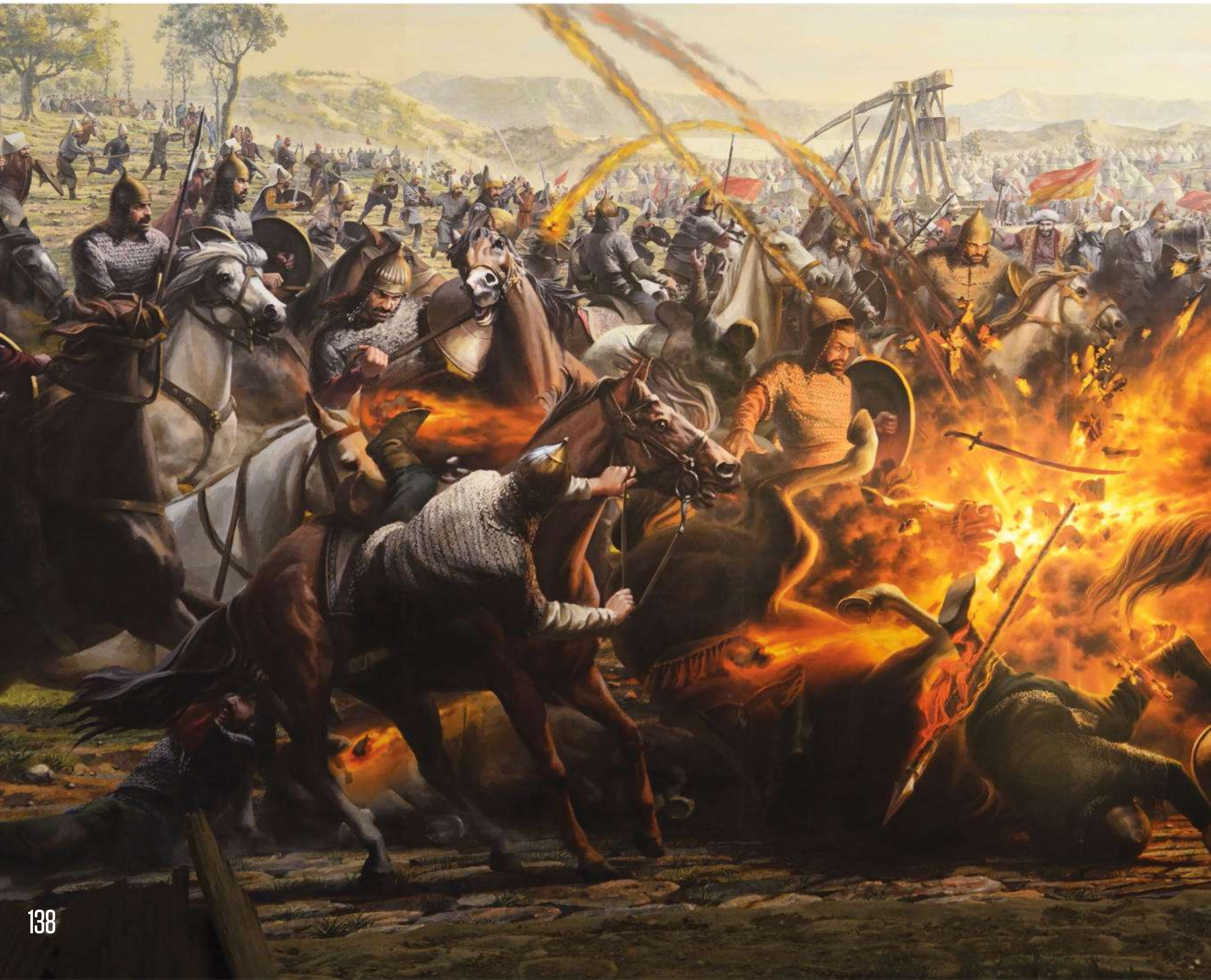
Strengths Possesses a good range and lethal in numbers.

Weakness Not as effective in close-quarters combat.

© Nicolle Fuller, Corbis

The Roman Empire's Last Stand

For 600 years, Islamists dreamed of seizing the wealthy city of Constantinople. In 1453, both sides prepared for a decisive showdown



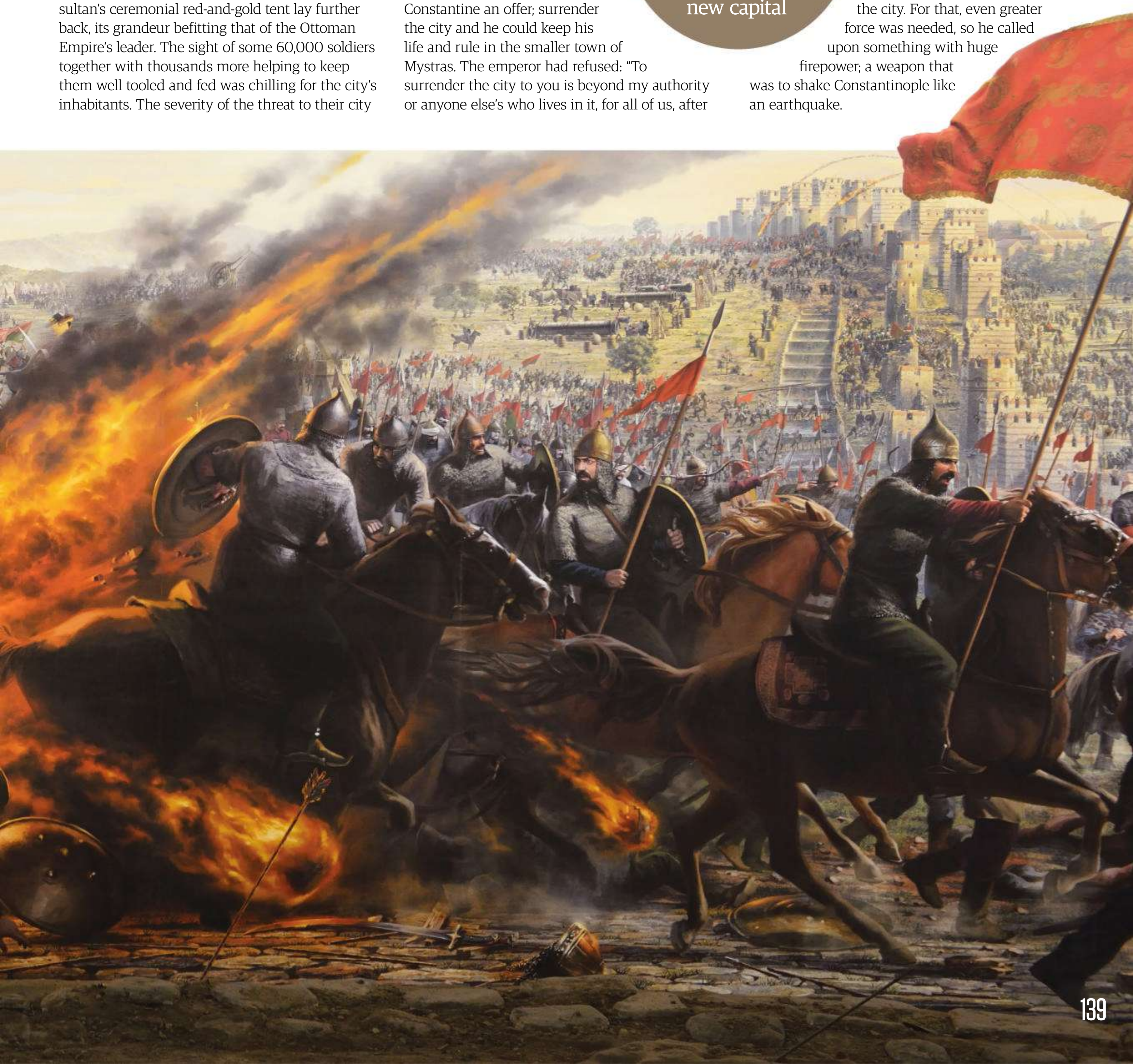
Sultan Mehmed II took his position on a small mound in sight of the walls of the ancient city of Constantinople. Those tasked with defending the city – the stronghold of Orthodox Christianity – from the waves of invaders that threatened her could clearly see his location as they peered across from the city walls over an incredible number of tents situated barely 230 metres (754 feet) away.

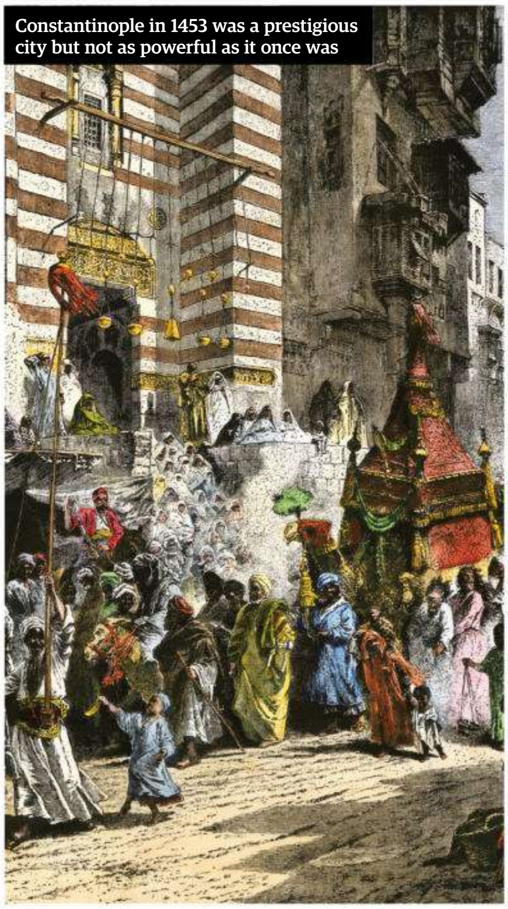
The tents were arranged in clusters. At the centre of each was the makeshift home of an officer, on top of each a defiant flag fluttering in the wind against the Sea of Marmara. The 21-year-old sultan's ceremonial red-and-gold tent lay further back, its grandeur befitting that of the Ottoman Empire's leader. The sight of some 60,000 soldiers together with thousands more helping to keep them well tooled and fed was chilling for the city's inhabitants. The severity of the threat to their city was clear. For the leader of Constantinople – the Byzantine emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos – the purpose of the incredible gathering within spitting distance of the city to which he had dedicated his life was clear. War was inevitable and his forces were outnumbered ten to one.

Mehmed was conscious of the need for a swift war on Constantinople, given the logistics involved with keeping such a large army well fed and healthy. He had made Constantine an offer; surrender the city and he could keep his life and rule in the smaller town of Mystras. The emperor had refused: "To surrender the city to you is beyond my authority or anyone else's who lives in it, for all of us, after taking the mutual decision, shall die out of free will without sparing our lives."

On 6 April 1453, the first attack came, light artillery firing at Constantinople. Soldiers pushed forward, trying to break through the city's walls, but the defenders proved strong. They repelled the invading army, causing many casualties. Even as cracks appeared in the walls, and fortresses on Bosphorus were taken, Mehmed realised it wasn't going to be easy to break the city. For that, even greater force was needed, so he called upon something with huge firepower; a weapon that was to shake Constantinople like an earthquake.

Emperor Constantine, after whom the city was named, dubbed it 'New Rome', designating it as the new capital





Constantinople in 1453 was a prestigious city but not as powerful as it once was

Constantine XI understood the political significance of his city. It was the gateway to Europe, an impregnable walled city that for 1,000 years had been besieged 23 times with just one success, at the hands of the Christian knights of the Fourth Crusade in 1203. Crucially, Constantinople – so important to the Eastern Roman Empire, or Byzantine Empire as it later became known – was the centre for trade and previously the world's largest and richest city. It had stood firm in the face of the Ottoman Empire that had expanded all around it, leaving it isolated in the middle of Europe and Asia.

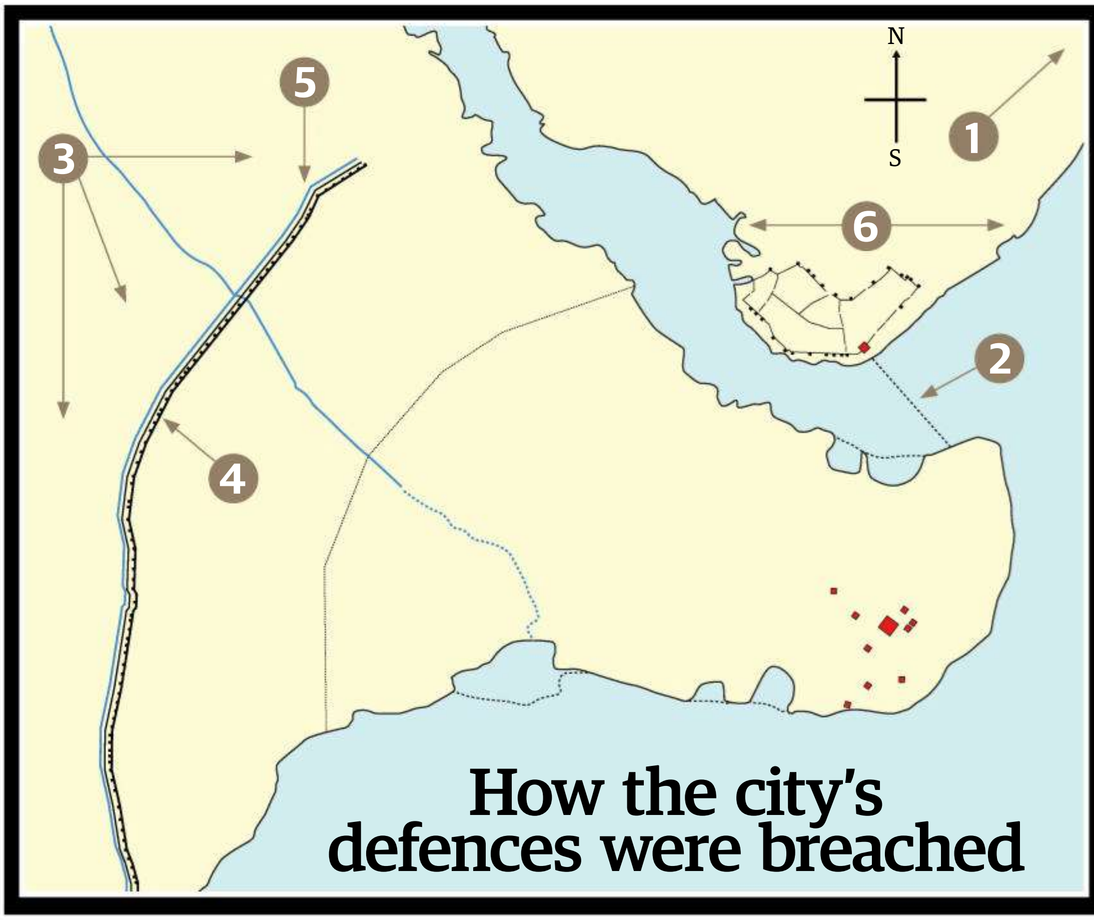
Constantinople had become the focus of jealousy among rival leaders who wanted to conquer what had become the last outpost of the once-mighty Roman Empire. Followers of Islam had lain siege on Constantinople between 674 and 678, trying again in 717 and 718 in line with the belief that its remaining strength would prevent Islam's reach into Europe. Christian Europe feared the fall of Constantinople, believing it would open the way for Islamic dominance. But even though the city saw off the attempted conquest, the death of Islamic martyrs had helped make it a holy place and the determination to try again burned deep.

Yet for hundreds of years the main threat to Constantinople as the centre for the Orthodox Church had come from Rome, the centre of the Catholic Church. The Fourth Crusade had devastated Constantinople's power and riches and so, by 1453, it was a pale shadow of its former self. By this point the Byzantine Empire – which at its height had included most of the Mediterranean coast – consisted of Constantinople and a few square miles outside. It might have lost its power but its location and history meant it was still desirable. Mehmed wanted it badly.

> The Roman Empire was a mere shadow of what it had been at the height of its power, but still demanded respect

The sultan was determined to succeed where his predecessors had failed. He had come to power thanks to his father, Murat, who had negotiated a ten-year truce with Christian crusaders intent on invasion. Mehmed had come to hold a desire to be the heir to the Roman Empire and extend his influence. He wanted one faith, one empire and one sovereignty in the world and by 1453, the time was right. Constantine XI had none of the power of those that had gone before him and the city, with its population of 100,000, was bankrupt. Constantinople had been paying vast sums to the Ottoman Empire as a way of avoiding invasion but this only served to financially cripple it. Now the enemy was camped on its doorstep, ready to

How the city's defences were breached



1. Rumeli Hisari (Fortress of Europe)
Winter 1451: Nicknamed Bozaz Kesen (meaning 'throat cutter'), Mehmed II ordered the building of a magnificent castle with 7.6-metre- (25-feet)-thick walls. Situated at the narrowest point of the Bosphorus Strait, its inhabitants used it to cut supplies to Constantinople.

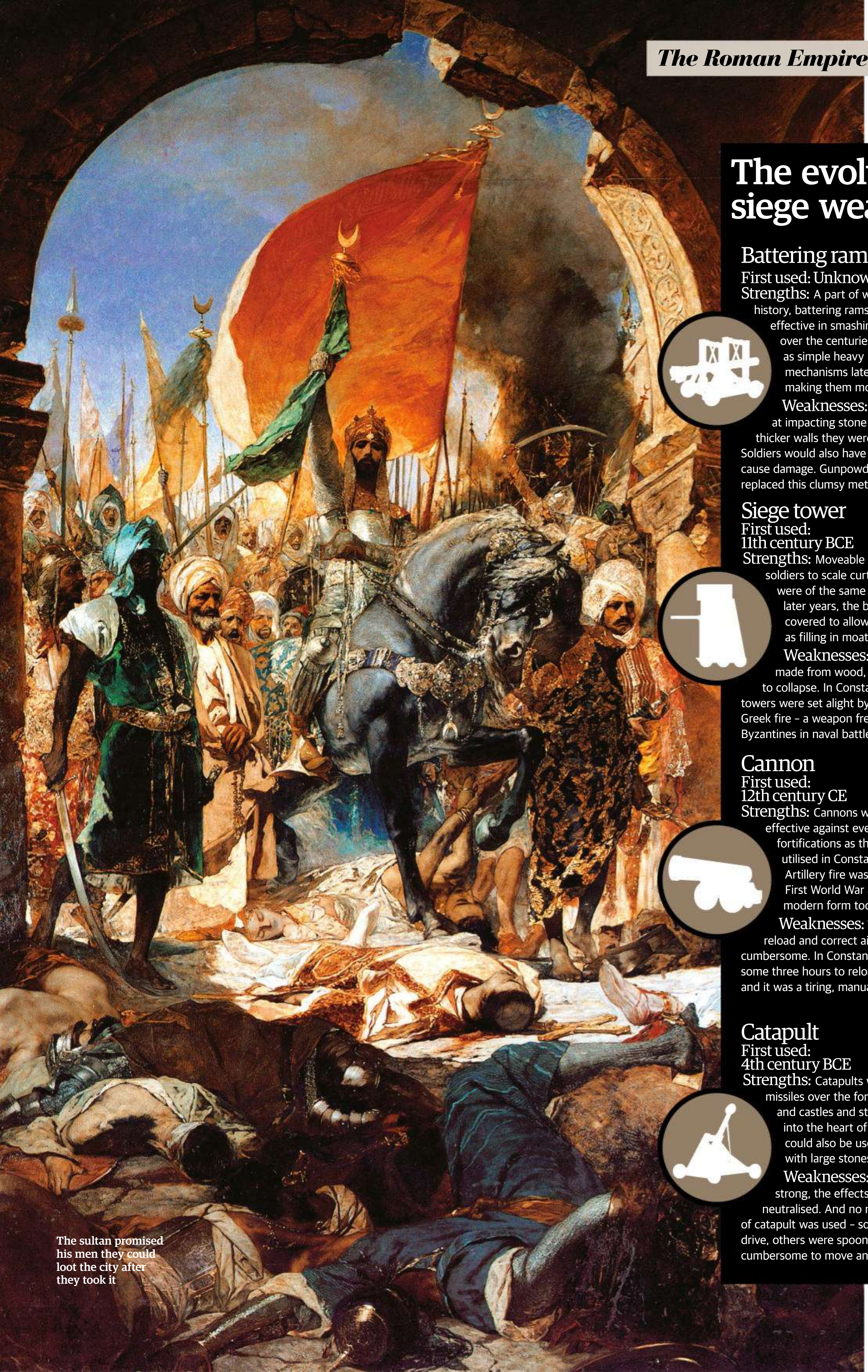
2. The chain
2 April 1453: Although the chain had been constructed centuries earlier, Constantine XI ensured it was strung across the mouth of the Golden Horn in Constantinople as the Ottoman army camped on their doorstep. It prevented enemy ships from entering the inlet.

3. Enemy camp
2 April 1453: Outside the city walls, the enemy Ottoman Turks together with a European army camped outside the city walls, the European army to the north of the river, the Janissaries in the middle protecting Mehmed, and the Anatolian army further down.

4. Theodosian Wall
6 April to 29 May 1453: This 6.5-kilometre (4-mile) stretch of land-locked wall was the primary target for the advancing enemy. They struck it with cannon fire and tried to breach it several times before finally succeeding on 29 May 1453, seizing the city.

5. The moat
The moat had been added in the fifth century and it was an extra barrier between any invading army and the city walls. It was around 20 metres (66 feet) wide and 7 metres (23 feet) deep. The Ottoman Turks tried desperately to fill it and allow for a safe and easy passage.

6. Bypassing the chain
22 April 1453: With the chain blocking access to the Golden Horn, Mehmed II ordered the ships to be carried over land instead. In the dead of night, they were pulled over difficult ground using log rollers and relaunched into the water, much to Constantine's surprise.



The sultan promised his men they could loot the city after they took it

The evolution of siege weapons

Battering ram

First used: Unknown

Strengths: A part of warfare since ancient history, battering rams have been highly effective in smashing down fortifications over the centuries. They started as simple heavy logs but swinging mechanisms later came into play, making them more advanced.

Weaknesses: Although great at impacting stone and brick, against thicker walls they were next to useless. Soldiers would also have to get up close to cause damage. Gunpowder and cannons replaced this clumsy method.

Siege tower

First used: 11th century BCE

Strengths: Moveable siege towers allowed soldiers to scale curtain walls since they were of the same size or higher. In later years, the bottom part would be covered to allow for covert work such as filling in moats.

Weaknesses: Since they were made from wood, they were vulnerable to collapse. In Constantinople, the siege towers were set alight by the defenders using Greek fire – a weapon frequently used by the Byzantines in naval battles.

Cannon

First used: 12th century CE

Strengths: Cannons were highly effective against even the strongest of fortifications as the super-cannons utilised in Constantinople showed. Artillery fire was used heavily in the First World War and lives on in a modern form today.

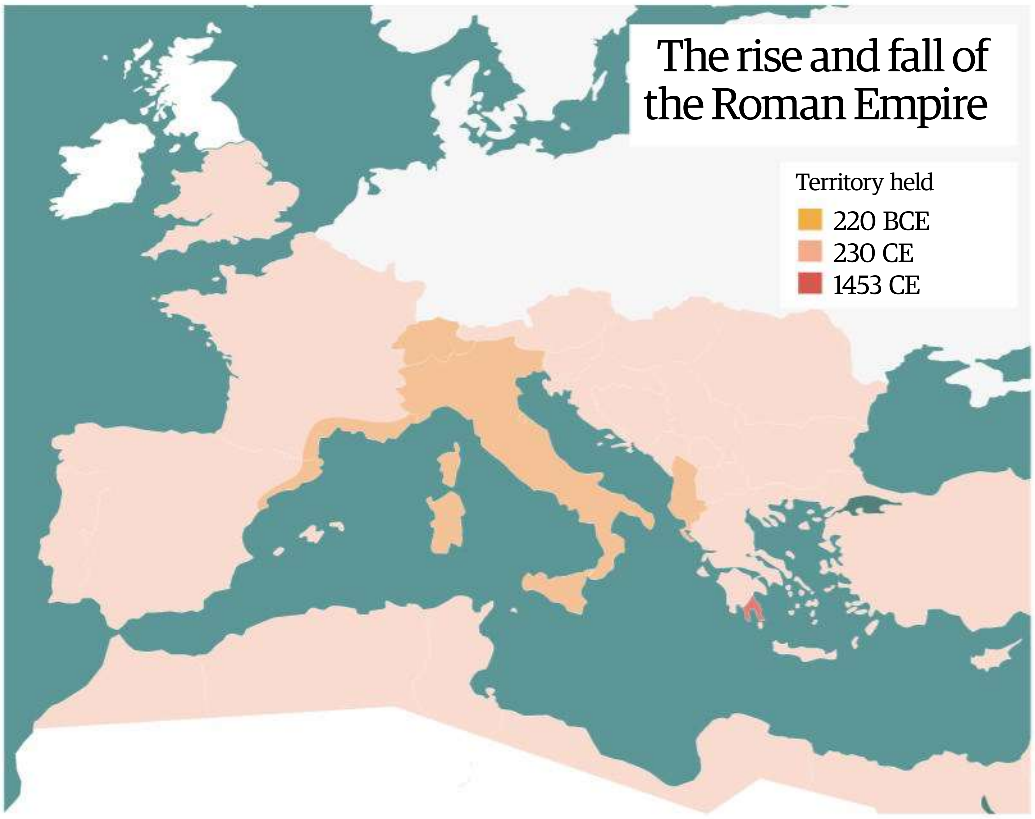
Weaknesses: The need to reload and correct aim makes them cumbersome. In Constantinople, it would take some three hours to reload the super-cannon and it was a tiring, manual process.

Catapult

First used: 4th century BCE

Strengths: Catapults were able to propel missiles over the fortified walls of cities and castles and strike death and fear into the heart of a population. They could also be used to smash the walls with large stones.

Weaknesses: When defences are strong, the effects of catapults can be neutralised. And no matter what type of catapult was used – some were tension drive, others were spoon-like – they were cumbersome to move and position.



> "He promised he could make a weapon large enough to fire a huge stone that would demolish the city's walls"

unleash hell. The 49-year-old Constantine knew the chances of his small army holding out were slim but vowed to fight to his last breath.

Constantine had made representations to the pope, knowing that an attack by the Ottoman forces could only be held off for so long. They needed reinforcements from the West to help tackle the threat. A union between the two churches was celebrated at the end of 1452, but despite the promise of warships, none arrived in the following months and with no help coming, Constantine stepped up the work of repairing and reinforcing the city's walls.

The last outpost of the Roman Empire was ringed by 19 kilometres (12 miles) of perimeter walling, most of it faced the edge of the sea. On the northern side was a chain that had been placed across the mouth of the Golden Horn, the primary inlet leading to a large harbour-like body of water. It prevented enemy ships from sailing past the northern part of Constantinople and was an important part of the city's defences. Constantine's strategy of defence was to put a greater emphasis on the 6.5 kilometres (four miles) of land-locked perimeter wall, but he was completely unaware of the latest secret weapon about to be unveiled by his enemy.

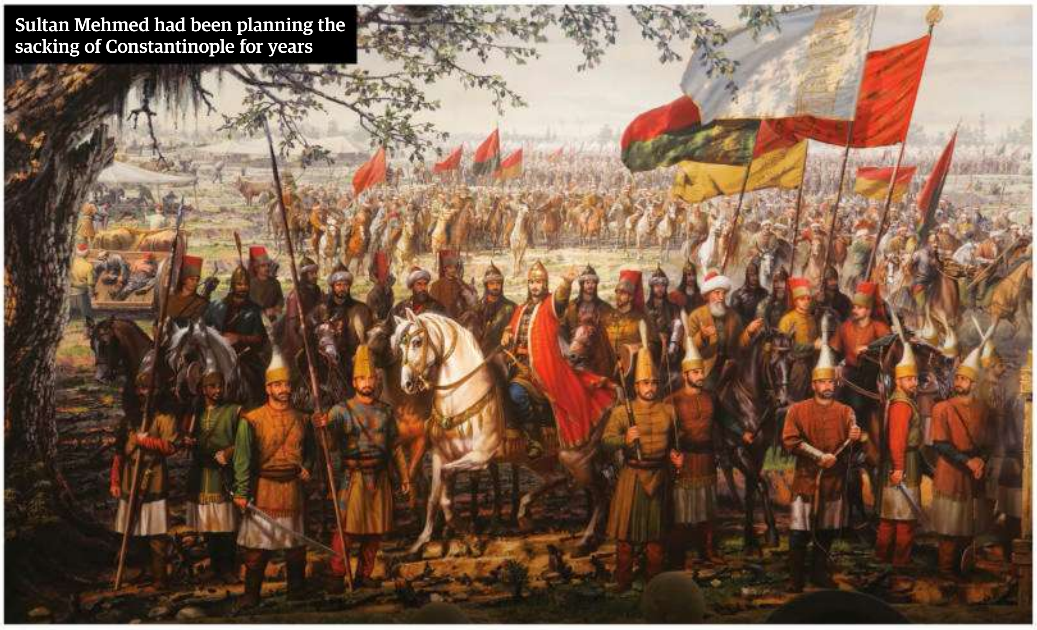
Mehmed enjoyed the discovery of new things and so was rather taken by a proposal to create a cannon larger than any other that had been built. This, he surmised, would be perfect to smash the famous walls of Constantinople.

Gunpowder had been available since around the 11th century – it appears on the Song Dynasty text *Wujing Zongyao* – so its power was not unknown. The Ottomans' new weapon was different, though. It was devised by an engineer called Orban, who had visited Constantinople from the kingdom of Hungary and was taken on by Constantine to develop new weaponry. The infrequent payments forced him to seek employment with Mehmed and he promised the sultan he could make a weapon large enough to fire a huge stone that would demolish the city's walls.

Orban was given an abundance of money and the materials to build his notorious super cannon. It took him a laborous three months to make the giant weapon, the end result being a monster that was 8.2 metres (27 feet) long and capable of hurling a 272-kilogram (600-pound) stone ball over an incredible 1.6 kilometres (one mile). When it hit the walls of Constantinople, the shock waves were immense. Constantine's men struggled in the face of the onslaught as it smashed into the stone surroundings, causing parts to crumble to the ground, leaving gaping holes in the city's precious defences. Their respite came in the three long hours it took to reload the cannon – they could use the time to repair the wall with mud and other materials that were available. The defenders draped animal skins over the walls, which, together with the mud, helped to cushion subsequent blows to that area.

The noise and incredible shaking of the walls and ground as each ball smashed into the city's walls caused as much psychological damage as it did physical. The pounding went on for days. Constantine was helped by Giovanni Giustiniani and his army of 700 professional soldiers from the island of Chiois. Giustiniani was instrumental in keeping the walls repaired and Constantinople somehow continued to hold strong. By now, the battle had raged for 12 days.

One of the major aims for Mehmed's army was to fill the moat surrounding the city walls so that access could be quickly gained but Constantine's men emptied them at night. Even so, there had been enough damage and headway for a second stab at taking over Constantinople on 18 April, but this was repelled.



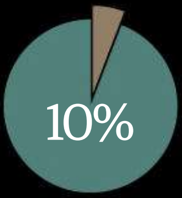
Sultan Mehmed had been planning the sacking of Constantinople for years

Historic cities sacked

Constantinople

Ottoman forces finally broke through the robust city walls and sturdy defences and gained access to the city of Constantinople. Amid the deafening sound, they slew hundreds of men, captured women and children and looted the city for promised riches.

How much of it was destroyed?



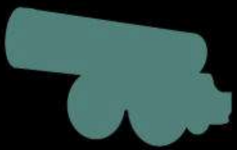
Main landmark or building destroyed

City walls of Constantinople

Death toll

4,000

Main weapon used



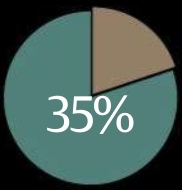
Cannon

29 MAY 1453

Antwerp

With Spain declared bankrupt, the Tercio was angry at not being paid and so swept into Antwerp with the intention of looting the city. Over three days, they stole large numbers of items and ended up setting fire to the city, completely destroying the wealthiest quarter.

How much of it was destroyed?



Main landmark or building destroyed

Death toll

8,000

Main weapon used

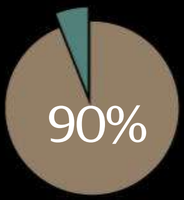
Fire

4 NOV 1576

Rome

The troops of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V became angry at not being paid. In the end more than 34,000 of them mutinied and headed for Rome. Churches and monasteries were looted and destroyed. Priests, monks and nuns were among those slaughtered in the revolt.

How much of it was destroyed?



Main landmark or building destroyed

Frescoes and statues

Death toll

12,000

Main weapon used

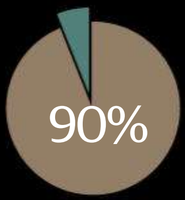
Swords

6 MAY 1527

Baghdad

Around 150,000 Mongols arrived in Baghdad and, on 13 February, entered the city, destroying and pillaging property for a week. One of the Mongols' biggest crimes was the soaking of hundreds of books in the Tigris River but their butchery was also severe.

How much of it was destroyed?

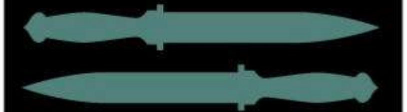


Main landmark or building destroyed

Death toll

1,000,000

Main weapon used

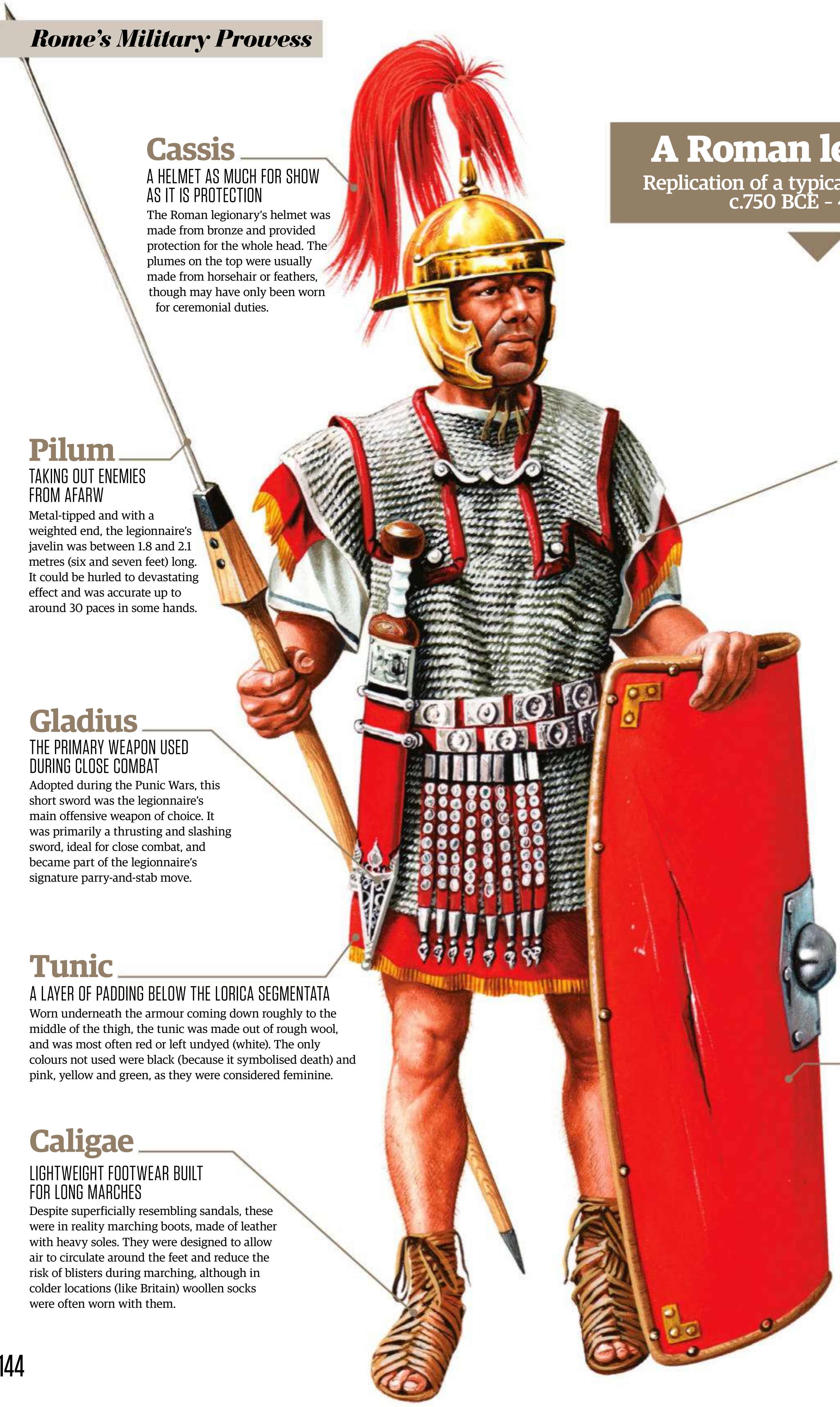


Knives

13 FEB 1258

A Roman legionary

Replication of a typical Roman soldier
c.750 BCE – 476 CE



Cassis

A HELMET AS MUCH FOR SHOW AS IT IS PROTECTION

The Roman legionary's helmet was made from bronze and provided protection for the whole head. The plumes on the top were usually made from horsehair or feathers, though may have only been worn for ceremonial duties.

Pilum

TAKING OUT ENEMIES FROM AFARW

Metal-tipped and with a weighted end, the legionnaire's javelin was between 1.8 and 2.1 metres (six and seven feet) long. It could be hurled to devastating effect and was accurate up to around 30 paces in some hands.

Gladius

THE PRIMARY WEAPON USED DURING CLOSE COMBAT

Adopted during the Punic Wars, this short sword was the legionnaire's main offensive weapon of choice. It was primarily a thrusting and slashing sword, ideal for close combat, and became part of the legionnaire's signature parry-and-stab move.

Tunic

A LAYER OF PADDING BELOW THE LORICA SEGMENTATA

Worn underneath the armour coming down roughly to the middle of the thigh, the tunic was made out of rough wool, and was most often red or left undyed (white). The only colours not used were black (because it symbolised death) and pink, yellow and green, as they were considered feminine.

Caligae

LIGHTWEIGHT FOOTWEAR BUILT FOR LONG MARCHES

Despite superficially resembling sandals, these were in reality marching boots, made of leather with heavy soles. They were designed to allow air to circulate around the feet and reduce the risk of blisters during marching, although in colder locations (like Britain) woollen socks were often worn with them.

Lorica segmentata

A COAT OF METAL TO DEFLECT ATTACKS

Once only used by the highest-ranking soldiers, this form of armour eventually became standard after the Romans perfected the ability to mass-produce metal goods. Consisting of strips of iron or steel that had been heated by coal and quenched in oil or water, it was perfect for deflecting swords and arrows.

Scutum

A SHIELD USED FOR BOTH DEFENCE AND OFFENCE

Constructed from plywood and covered in leather, the oval-shaped shield, called a scutum, was over a metre (3.3 feet) in length, and proved a valuable defence against ranged weapons. Up close, it could also be used as a weapon.

© Ian Jackson/The Art Agency

One of the most effective pre-war plans enacted by the Ottomans was the building of a large castle on the European side of Constantinople, in close proximity to the city. Finished well in time for the siege, Ottomans nicknamed it Bogaz Kesen, which translates as the 'throat cutter'. Taking just four months to complete, it could be used to control sea traffic on the Bosphorus strait. The Ottoman Turks could cut supplies to Constantinople by blasting away at defiant ships trying to sail past, using large cannons situated on the water's edge. Constantinople was dangerously isolated.

But just as the Ottoman Turks had made preparations, so too had Constantinople. The defenders had strung a chain across the mouth of the Golden Horn. By blocking access to the waterway, the defenders were able to prevent an onslaught from that direction. The defenders had proved adept at seeing off the Ottomans' naval advances and there had been close ship-to-ship combat during which the Byzantines emerged victorious. Yet cutting off the Golden Horn meant they could concentrate their efforts on defending the land-lying areas of the wall instead.

The sultan's solution was ingenious. Mehmed looked at the chain and surveyed the land close by. He decided the answer would be to haul the ships over land from the sea to the water cut off by the chain. And so it began. Soldiers and oxen pulled at the ships, sending them over pre-laid rollers greased with animal fat. Scores of ships were hauled over in a mammoth overnight task. Surprised and aghast, the defenders were unsure what to do. The ships were now able to fire at the scantly guarded wall to the side of the Golden Horn. Within hours, great damage was being caused and the victorious Mehmed showed his ruthless side. When a group of defenders managed to escape from one sunken ship, Mehmed's punishment was to have them impaled.

The high-stakes game of cat and mouse continued and Mehmed ordered the Ottomans to mine under the city. On 16 May, Christian soldiers heard underground activity and went to investigate. Their discovery of miners put them on high alert and, having sorted the initial problem, they tried to think up effective ways to spot further attempts. John Grant, a Scotsman who had found himself in Constantinople, recommended placing buckets of water around the walls of the city. A ripple on the surface of the water would immediately alert them to possible mining. Remarkably, it actually worked.

The attacks may have been repelled but the defenders were getting tired and their walls were a mess. On 27 May, Mehmed made the decision to throw everything at the city. Ottoman forces bombarded the walls relentlessly, causing heavy damage. They were fast and furious, giving the defenders little time to make repairs. Mehmed then prepared his men to march forward. They were, he said, not to touch the structure of the city – he wanted Constantinople to remain as intact as possible so that it could form his capital. They could loot and enslave, though. With this promise, the army spent 28 May getting ready, praying, resting and running through their tactics.

Constantine prepared his beloved city, encouraged his soldiers to fight to the very last man and vowed to defend his city to the death. There were just 4,000 men left to hold Constantinople – half that at the start of the siege. On 29 May, after a 47-day siege, the invaders surged forward, scaling the walls. They were pushed back by the defenders who knocked away ladders and used hot oil to scald the invaders. Two waves of attack were repelled.

But Mehmed's Janissaries – Christians picked up by the Ottomans as children and trained as fighters – broke through, their elite training enabling them to breech the walls after numerous hours of fighting. There were hand-to-hand battles in the narrow streets of the city. The defenders knew the city were soon overpowered. Screams filled the night air. As Ottoman soldiers poured into Constantinople, the city was completely overwhelmed.

The Ottomans flung open the great bronze doors of Saint Sophia and massacred large numbers of worshippers. With priests dying by the altar and with a vast number of prisoners being rounded up, the end was upon the city. Their emperor tore off his imperial ornaments so he looked like any normal soldier, saying, "The city is fallen and I am still alive", and charging to his death. The invaders tied up any enemy they didn't slaughter, grabbed women and fought over the most attractive of them. Children were led into slavery and the city was ransacked of what little it had left. After more than 1,000 years of a glorious Constantinople, the last outpost of the Roman Empire was no more.

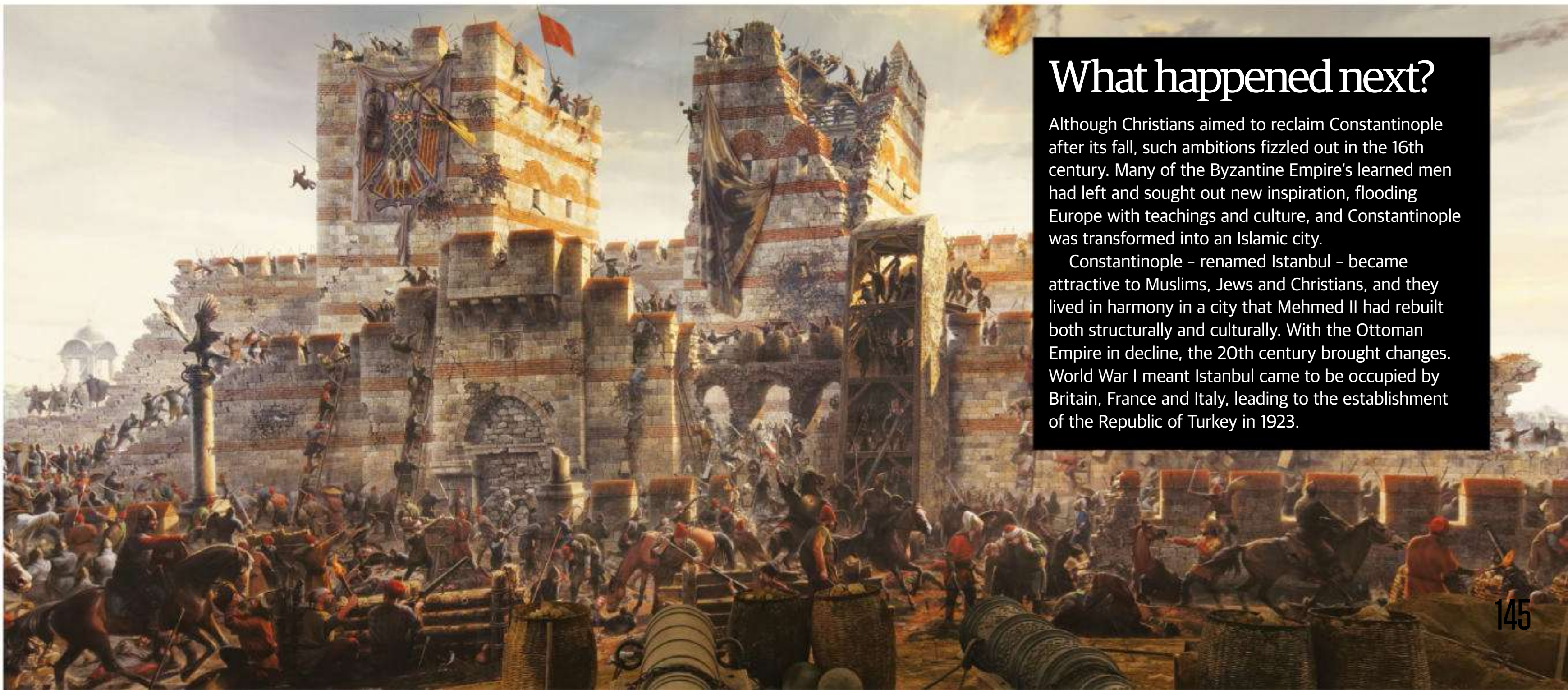
> Constantinople was the last gem of the Byzantine Empire, a reminder of the military prowess of the Roman Empire

Who was the city named after?

The city was named after Constantine the Great, the Roman emperor from 306 to 337 CE. He had battled against Emperor Maxentius for control of the Western Roman Empire in 312 and won. It was a victory that allowed him, as the first emperor to convert to Christianity, to lead the way for religious tolerance.

Under Constantine, the empire flourished, eventually being unified in 324. Constantine continued to look east and established New Rome in Byzantium. The Romans renamed this Constantinople in his honour and it came to be the capital of what became known as the Byzantine Empire.

© Rex; Alamy; Thinkstock



What happened next?

Although Christians aimed to reclaim Constantinople after its fall, such ambitions fizzled out in the 16th century. Many of the Byzantine Empire's learned men had left and sought out new inspiration, flooding Europe with teachings and culture, and Constantinople was transformed into an Islamic city.

Constantinople – renamed Istanbul – became attractive to Muslims, Jews and Christians, and they lived in harmony in a city that Mehmed II had rebuilt both structurally and culturally. With the Ottoman Empire in decline, the 20th century brought changes. World War I meant Istanbul came to be occupied by Britain, France and Italy, leading to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923.

ALL ABOUT HISTORY

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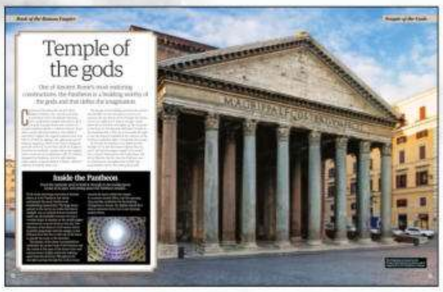

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